# BEN JONSON'S *SEJANUS*

## Historiography and the Political Tragedy

by

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## Synopsis

Though Ben Jonson's Sejanus has received virtually no approbation as a work for the theater, it has yet been the subject of much critical attention. There is widespread recognition that the play is no ordinary failure, that it is a work full of learning, carefully structured and thematically potent, an intelligent effort to reform Renaissance historical tragedy. Still there is no agreement about what kind of achievement the play actually represents. The concern of this dissertation is with the intellectual origins of the play; it is a study in the traditions and methods which appear to have guided Jonson in his writing of Sejanus. It is my thesis that its genesis is to be found in Jonson's interest in non-literary disciplines - history, methods of historical writing, politics and constitutional issues - rather than in literary criticism and conventions. Jonson found his new style in political history, his themes in the conflict between morality and the logistics of realpolitik.

The first chapter contains a brief account of the circumstances in which the play was written, the stage failure, the highly varied opinions of the critics, a summary of the basic problem, and a resumé of the play, itself, as a political treatise.

Chapter two is concerned primarily with Tacitus, Jonson's major source for the play. It is not a study of the mere transposition of facts, however, but of Roman historiographical methods, Tacitus' themes, characterizations, even his own temperament, for the influence they had upon Jonson. The Annals contains a mixture of satiric, tragic and epic intents which reappear in the play. Jonson sees political crises as Tacitus does, the contest for power, the relationship between personal ambition, corruption and decline on a national scale. In the work of

both writers there is a distinct combination of lament, invective and objective detachment inherent in their styles and thematic concerns.

In the third chapter the rise of new historiographical methods in sixteenth-century England is set out in order to establish the likenesses between this "scientific", empirical, highly analytic political history and the play. My contention is that Sejanus was the result of a need to bring historical drama up to date in terms of the methods and purposes of historical writing and to employ the advantages of the drama as a point of view in elucidating the matters of political history. Jonson was not only trying to write sound drama which would please an audience and inform them in matters of state, but also a sound history in the new mode.

The fourth chapter takes up the problem of tragedy, its traditional relationship to the history play and the difficulties involved in amalgamating the two concerns. The plays of the closet dramatists are introduced for comparison and the Italian critics on Aristotle are discussed as far as they are relevant. But here, I think, the play as an innovative work, must be allowed to suggest its own intents. Not complying with traditional concepts of tragedy, at least "romantic" tragedy, Sejanus is yet a serious work which, in the order of its materials, suggests its own definition of tragedy. Stock De casibus patterns, the tragedy of the villain hero, of the overreacher and the struggle between Titan knaves appear but these can be misleading. More essential is a definition of tragedy which de-emphasizes the hero and concentrates upon the decline of an entire state and upon the victims of political treachery. Various factors informing Jonson's tragic vision are Senecan Stoicism, contradictions inherent in constitutional settlements, human ambition related to party politics, the conflict between morality and raison d'état, the cycles of states, their ineluctable rising and falling. New forms of history give rise to

Jonson's new form of tragedy.

The play is complex politically and historically, yet there is an integrity in the work both in its structuring and themes. The conclusion is a critical essay on how all these diverse materials and interests are superimposed and culminate in a single unified work.

## Preface

It is not my intention in this dissertation to fault all of the previous criticism on Jonson's Sejanus and supply the new definitive interpretation, but rather to consider the work in a larger intellectual context than has yet been established for it. Building that context will be my major undertaking. One of the best known facts about the play is that Jonson researched his materials well and relied closely upon his sources. This has suggested to me that Sejanus is more than a history play which merely contains facts taken from Tacitus, made-over to fit conventional English dramatic modes and serve conventional thematic ends. To begin with, Jonson's research and meticulous care in designing the play make it not only a work of art, but a significant piece of interpretative historical writing. The work invites consideration in the terms of both disciplines. By no means essential for an initial understanding of the play, yet a reading of Tacitus demonstrates its qualities as history. Tacitus, as an historian and as an observer of the political events of first-century Rome, had his own themes, his own world vision, products of his historiographical methods, his chosen subject matter, his personal experiences and temperament. It is my thesis that Jonson not only read Tacitus for the facts but "understood" him, his particular themes and concerns, and took note of how they were created. This opens a new area for exploration in explaining not only the use of source materials in the play, but the origins of Jonson's characteristic themes and the genesis of his tragic vision. It is not so much a matter of Tacitus' direct influence as it is one of Jonson's arriving at similar conclusions about how to portray and interpret the political dealings of Tiberius' reign.

Tacitus, through his historical writing, created for posterity an impression of the Roman political life under the Caesars, a Roman milieu characterized by intrigue, treachery, tyranny, endless factions, trials and see-saw struggles for power. (The general descriptions of Rome in my chapter two are interpretative elaborations upon this Tacitean world.) His account includes the portrayal of a number of dominating personalities including the extraordinarily ambitious Sejanus and the cunning Tiberius, along with a huge cast of minor characters - though they are often so succinctly described, even in a line or two, that they take on significant dimensions as characters illustrative of the facets of political behavior. Tacitus related events, but not without supplying their causes, which he invariably traced both to the influence of the human will and to the constitutional system, the political power settlement of the civil war. A philosophy of history emerged in Tacitus' writings which explained the decay of the great Roman state. The uniqueness of Sejanus as a political history play and as political tragedy, I contend, is, to a large extent, the result of Jonson's desire to reproduce that Roman milieu in play form. He chose from the Annals the career of Sejanus and retold it in such a way that a Tacitean philosophy of history and Tacitean themes are manifest through it. My first task has been to enlarge upon that Tacitean world, explain the political conditions, the personalities and the constitutional crisis which form the materials of the play.

One then comes to Tacitus, himself, the man who left this astute vision of the political life which subsequent readers have alternately called a brilliant analysis of policy and demonic instruction in statescraft. He was a man who had qualifications for writing a sound

and responsible political history. His skepticism rescued him from gullibility; his sense of integrity kept him to his task as an exposer of abuses. Taciteon themes arose founded upon events thoroughly researched. Tacitus was directly concerned with the kinds and classes of men who determined the directions of the life of state: senators, aristocratic family members, the novus homo opportunist, the stoic opponents of the government and, of course, the emperors. Equally he devoted himself to analyzing political causes, factions, the treason laws, the imperial power, the despondency of the Senate. Indirectly Tacitus was concerned with constitutional adjustments, the delegation of powers, a fixed and unalterable set of circumstances which gave rise to many of the governmental abuses in first-century Rome.

Jonson not only introduces all these variables, human and institutional, into the play, but he arranges them in ways resembling Tacitus' in order to advance the same themes, expose the causes of political injustice as Tacitus did, mock the treason laws, display the corrupt uses of political rhetoric, explore, in the same way, the will and interests of the Emperor, the temptations of the office, show the weakened powers of the Senate and, more particularly, relate the damage which Sejanus did to Rome and point out the ironies of his rise to and fall from power. The play, thus, becomes specific history, an interpretation of Tacitus' historical vision and a treatise on the political life to the extent that the particular comes to stand for the general through the drama.

In considering Tacitus as a literary craftsman, in marking the care with which he wrote the Annals in order to achieve special thematic effects, the relevance he has for the study of Jonson, I am convinced, does not end with the materials. The Annals, by design and through

individual observations and characterizations, reveals a vision behind the facts which has dimensions both satiric and tragic. By sheer repetition, Tacitus established the incessant ironies of Roman politics and the causal links between individual acts of ambition, aggression, pride and the downward course of the entire society. Tacitus pointed both to the irremedial vices of human nature and the tragic decline of the Roman state; the work is both satiric and epic. Thus genre arose out of the treatment of historical materials. These patterns emerged as the axioms of Tacitus' historical studies. Jonson, in informing his materials with a similar order, makes his way toward a discovery of the genre patterns which arise out of the historical events themselves. It is, therefore, not only my intention to illustrate how closely the play-world is a dramatized duplication of the many and complex variables of Roman political life, but also to show how Tacitus' themes and his efforts as an artist in the creation of history are related to Jonson's own techniques in the preparation of a political and historical tragedy.

My second basic thesis is that the difference between Sejanus as a political Roman play and earlier plays of this kind is equivalent to the differences between the medieval and Tudor moralists and chroniclers and the works of modern, secular, objective, political history, works based upon research and directed toward the analysis of political events and an explanation of political causes. These works represent a development in historiography carried out, not only during Jonson's formative years, but by men who were personal friends of his. This is not a contradiction of the thesis concerning Tacitus, but an extension of it. Sejanus was but one work based upon the

rediscovery of Tacitus as a political historian in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Tacitus' kind of political assessment in the form of history had not been written, with very few exceptions, for well over a thousand years. But with the rise of modern secular states following the reformation, the appearance of the works of Machiavelli and Guicciardini, with the recognition of the craft and tactics of policy employed in the preservation and usurpation of power, circumstances in the political world were again right for this kind of historiography. Such English intellectuals as Bacon, Camden and Hayward had come to realize the presence of policy as a fact of the political life and that it should be studied. The question was to what end. A crisis for the age was whether it should be condemned outright or systematized and scrupulously taught to the legitimate rulers of state. This same intellectual crisis is suggested in the play and perhaps partially accounts for its unpopularity in Jonson's own time. Jonson covered himself by revealing the satiric dimensions of his account, by proposing, indirectly, a balance of old-fashioned morality. Yet, Jonson, as an objective historian, allows the measures of expediency and realpolitik to stand.

The evidence from the play that Sejanus is such a work, evidence which I will establish at greater length in the first chapter, is derived basically from the total design of the work. Jonson provides a complete treatise on policy, its tactics, and the results. He anatomizes duplicity and deceptive rhetoric; he concentrates only upon those elements of character which contribute to the political life. The work is founded upon fact and Jonson does not falsify, omit or significantly reinterpret in order to produce a conventional

moral vision or didacticize on the evils of state. There is an objectivity in the style despite the outbursts of such allegedly choric characters as Arruntius; Jonson preserves this to the end, leaving the Rome of his play in the hands of the enigmatic Tiberius and the new upstart, Macro. His themes, therefore, are not those of the historical plays of the 1590s, but of the new political historians. An explanation of Jonson's issues is to be found, not in the earlier drama, but in Bacon and Hayward, issues which he explored because he followed the techniques of the new historians, as much as drama allowed, in preparing his materials.

For this reason I have made a study of the historical revolution with special emphasis upon isolating those techniques and principles which apply to Sejanus. Medieval historiography is set out briefly for purposes of contrast. Sejanus is designed, ostensibly, as a moral De casibus tragedy, but the play reveals so many other principles of design in light of the new criteria established for historical writing, that this favorite explanation of the play is invalidated. All the thematic implications of the tragedy of the hero are absent. Causal explanation reduces fortune to a metaphor. Medieval theories of rule, of the description of government based upon cosmic theories and systems of anelogies are also absent from the play, even from the imagery. In the place of the "Elizabethan world picture," which Sejanus does not fit, I have supplied a Baconian value system. Bacon's attitudes toward art and history, induction, politics and the uses of policy, the purposes of history all correspond to the values of the play.

The temptation to explore the historical revolution in some depth for the light it could also cast upon Jonson's dramatic techniques

was too great to avoid. As with Tacitus, I became interested in discovering what connections existed between Jonson's principles of dramatic history writing and the techniques of political historiography. Issues become, at this juncture, highly complex and often speculative, making it more difficult to extract the surest line of argument. Essentially my thesis is that Sejanus is a history which, as a political treatise, is inductively argued and that in the overall dramatic structure, Jonson suggests the axioms he has drawn from the study. Of course, this leads to the whole problem of the philosophy of history, truth and objectivity, the reliability of the observer, the presence of the historian in his work, debates which are age-old, highly theoretical and easily lead away from the issues at hand. Yet such matters are central ones for the play. Jonson, as a "new" historian, had to make a mental readjustment to the purposes of history and the place of the writer in that history, a readjustment reflected in Sejanus. Dramatic form implies intent; the inductive method entails waiting upon the exemplum before conclusions are drawn. I am willing to argue that an awareness of the value of the inductive approach makes the historian mindful of the kinds of themes (which may be his own as well) which arise from the materials themselves and that they are the truest and most telling ones. The point for Jonson is that his themes do differ significantly in scope and emphasis from those of the earlier moral historians. Dramatic reconstruction, an art form from which the author has ostensibly withdrawn his own voice entirely, is a perfect vehicle. At the same time, dramatic form has the power to lift the specific exemplum to a representative one; the play suggests, through making a symbol of itself, the universal which is implied in

the succinctly chosen particular. Jonson develops the strengths in both attitudes and works out a balance between them. The purposes of the new history thus find their equivalents in the techniques of Jonson's drama. It is a hard thesis, but one, I am convinced, worth the making.

The same thing, in simpler terms, is that the purposes of history, its themes and techniques, changed late in the sixteenth century. In so far as the definition of the history play meant advancing the purposes and themes of history dramatically, the dramatist had to find equivalents for the narrative techniques, find ways to reveal those themes on the stage or else abandon the history play as a legitimate form of historiography. My assumption, based upon what Sejanus is as a play, is that Jonson's attempted reform of the historical tragedy was based upon his desire to write an interpretative and authoritative political history, founded upon the most accomplished of the Roman historians and according to the principles of the new historiography. His whole study was now to find dramatic equivalents, preserve a fidelity to his materials and their inherent themes, and yet delight and instruct a popular audience. Jonson was, in a sense, caught between his livlihood and his self-respect as a classicist and scholar-historian. Even though the play was not a stage success, the historical revolution is one explanation of why Jonson wrote it as he did, of why it is such a sustained and scholarly work and of why it is so brilliant and rewarding as a study in political affairs, one of the very few truly Roman historical plays.

In order to bring Sejanus to a final dramatic form, Jonson did not avoid making certain compromises. He mentions a few in his preface to the printed version of the play. Even while Jonson worked according to the criteria of the political historiographers, he also had ideals about the restrained, well-made classical play. The amalgamation of disciplines entailed difficult choices. Moreover, the very act of dramatizing made its own demands. The play, political as Jonson may have intended it and a study of a whole society, still had to convey its entire intent through characters and dialogue. It appears that Jonson, in reducing his historical vision to those terms, did everything possible to frustrate the easy responses which follow from attachments to one character, and to prevent glib assessments which come easily to the viewer through "purple-passages" and outworn platitudinous plots: that the wicked always fall, that God has all world events in his control, that rebellion never pays, that tyranny hurts the commonweal and invites civil war, or slightly more subtle insights into great men torn by indecision, wracked by double loyalties and other such psychological contests. Characters are revealed only as political beings in Sejanus. Jonson stays by his chosen matter. All characters are representative roles, no matter what their parts or how central, in the anatomization of the life of state. Nevertheless, founded on theories of Jonson's attachments to the established dramatic conventions, critics have sought repeatedly to explain Sejanus as a tragedy in these terms. (A few of these accounts are briefly outlined in chapter one.) But Jonson wanted to use dramatic form in such a way that a reservation of judgement upon the issues raised by the play would be necessitated. Men would, otherwise, fail to perceive the more complex relations and issues of the political state. Jonson not only had to apprehend the issues of policy, constitutions, fathom the

political rhetoric, but to reveal them in the theater for the edification of his audience in the true matters of state.

The definition of tragedy is an area of study as vast as the study of historiography. Yet it could not be escaped, since what Jonson understood to be historical in Sejanus, he also understood to be tragic. I wanted to know what Jonson understood the tragic vision of Sejanus to be, how it arose out of his materials and how it was shaped by the conventions of tragedy inherited from earlier dramatists, the Italian critics, and from the ancients. My approach to the whole problem is through the closet dramatists, those few, for the most part unread, tragedians who wrote for a coterie audience on political themes often based upon Roman history. They also attempted to follow theories of neo-classical drama. Sejanus is not such a play, but there are many resemblances, not only in materials and issues, but in the ways both these writers and Jonson solved problems of style and organization in treating their chosen subjects. Again, influence is a moot question, and again, I think it not a crucial one. The classical ideals of the academic drama were common information. But it is useful, for illustrative purposes, to consider Sejanus as a kind of closet play in purpose and design, with alterations required for the theater, as long as such a thesis is balanced with at least two further assertions: that Sejanus is also a play in the Roman play tradition, its other close dramatic relative, and that it is an original achievement in form and content and therefore a work independent of the existing dramatic and critical traditions.

My third basic thesis is that Sejanus is an innovative form of tragedy because of Jonson's special uses of history, that historical themes and patterns gave rise to the tragic order of the play. This is not a notion easy to summarize. With the de-centralization of the

hero and the new concern with the whole spectrum of political causes in the play, interest shifts away from Sejanus' rise and fall, landing sometimes upon Agrippina and her struggle, or upon Tiberius' political roles, or the fates of the republican senators falsely accused of treason. The historian's eye turns from issue to issue, yet builds a complete picture. The question is whether such parts and the resultant whole also form a literary order. I believe that as these characters become the centers of various representative political actions, a tragic order emerges which has several levels of attachment; sometimes it is the tragedy of the political victim, sometimes the tragedy of the state, itself.

At this point it became necessary to look into the theories of tragedy both in Jonson's time and in our own, to discover the ranges within which definitions can be broadened, to find the relationship between the historical event and the tragic experience. It is my conviction that, even as a staged play, Sejanus is a visual reconstruction of an historical event which, upon reflection, contains its own thematic order, one that is to be reconstructed again in the mind of the beholder, and that the tragic emotions are produced by an intellectual recognition that the events presented are true, that the human causes which lead to suffering and injustice are universal, that the political impasses reached in first-century Rome are true and inherent in any constitutional arrangement and that, therefore, this account threatens all civilized men in all places. The conflict is essentially an ideological one and the tragic experience is based upon an intellectual recognition of precisely what and how unavoidable the terms of the conflict are. Jonson merely backs up to symbolize in his representative exemplum the sides of the argument

raging around Machiavelli and the Tudor constitution and places man the manipulator and the victim in the center of the argument. Jonson's tragic vision is in the completeness of his historical relation, the truth of the political tactics, anatomized, and the authority with which the facts are established. It is Jonson's bid for writing a serious play which reaches the political issues of modern times, a play which has the effect of removing men in order to establish the policies of state in the abstract and then of replacing men as vital, right-seeking creatures back into this vicious political world.

In abstract terms, the essence of Jonsonian tragedy is the implicit recognition in the play of the weakness in human nature and social systems which victimize men, and the age-old struggle between principles of morality and the moralities of states which sometimes must violate human rights for the sake of the commonweal. By making the state an entity in the play as embodied by the political tactics of Tiberius, the rightful emperor who is yet the corrupt private man, Jonson introduces this perspective into the drama. For this reason, I have conducted a relatively long discussion on raison d'état. Jonson's tragic recognition emerges from the fact that he understands and has to submit to this contest between moralities which has plagued modern man. Thus political history, symbolized in dramatic form, produces from its own characteristic conflicts, a new tragic order which Jonson understands and advances in Sejanus as the prevailing tragic essence superseding all other hints of conventional tragedy employed as expedient and compromise measures in reducing his materials entirely to tragic form. It is ironic that without such vestigial conventions (T. S. Eliot is one of the few who has regretted their presence), it is difficult to guess what kind of tragedy Sejanus would have been thought to be.

The basic argument goes from sources to historiography to theories of tragedy. Jonson gave the primacy, I think, to the integrity of the historical event as history. Bound by new criteria as an historian he no longer felt free to adopt and apply his materials. It was in a specific "found" account of a political transaction that Jonson had to find his dramatic order. Tacitus showed how speech-making, characterization, sequencial ordering, a deleting of irrelevancies served the creation of the narration yet gave rise to a thematic order. In this political history Jonson rediscovered a powerful expression of man's dilemma as a political being which had satiric implications as well as tragic dimensions; both are related to the viciousness of human nature and how it sought expression through the governing channels of state, bringing that state down in consequence. Sejanus has the strength of secular political history, yet the vigor of an incisive anatomization of policy and the tragic grip which comes from a discovery that the play world is true and that the principles and men in conflict which lead to waste remain true. Finally, Sejanus, as representative history, implies such a breadth of reference that the hopelessness of men in their inevitably destructive political courses, appears pervasive; man inhabits an "absurd" world, the illogic(ality) and waste of which Jonson refuses to mitigate. He supplies no dilutions, consolations or escapes. Sejanus then becomes a very powerful statement, indeed.

Two central themes I will hope to establish through this dissertation: that Jonson is not a confused political theorist in this play, a writer who is overwhelmed by his materials and unable to design a moral vision. Rather, Jonson carries that moral vision back to the facts of the political life as he found them in history (and,

no doubt, recognized them in his own times), and that he is aware of the much greater paradoxes of the political life: that there is no solution to the struggle between threats of treason and threats of tyranny, between morality and reasons of state, that men are victimized by their own sacred principles. In recording these insights through an historical example, the work produces its own sense of fear, satiric invective and its own bid for open-eyed understanding, unclouded by myths of comfort. In that way Jonson becomes a truly responsible and perspicacious observer of the verities and inherent conflicts in political life. Jonson records them as an historian, but "sees" them as a poet. The suggestions of genre are after the fact, yet they are built-in implications of the political life, the discovery of which must begin with a close scrutinization of the facts. That, I think, is new to the drama, and a new point in the critical assessment of the drama. Secondly, Jonson was a reformer of English historical tragedy as he was of the comedy and his success in this, (stage failures aside - his comedies were often delighted in for all the wrong reasons too) was equally great. Essentially free of all that was useless to him in the traditions, despite his alleged loyalties to classical tenets, he forged his own dramatic forms to fit the definition of the historical play as it had to be written in order to be history. A description of this Jonsonian form of tragedy has never really satisfactorily been offered and it has been my intention to move some way in that direction, primarily by explaining the ways in which Jonson produced a tragic vision out of his philosophy of history and fulfilled the criteria of both disciplines in one work, a difficult and, perhaps, not-to-be-repeated synthesis.

## Contents

# Chapter One

## Introduction

## I

## Stage History and Publication

Sejanus was not Jonson's first attempt at tragedy. We have this on the testimony of Francis Meres who listed in his Palladis Tamia the name of Ben Jonson among those who "are our best for Tragedie."[1] Meres refers to the lost works which Jonson probably wrote for Henslowe's troupes before 1598 (the year in which Palladis Tamia was entered in the Stationers' Register).[2] The care with which Jonson wrote and supervised the printing of his later plays suggests that he suppressed the earlier works intentionally, either because they did not meet his standards or because he did not wish to rewrite the parts prepared by collaborators as he did before publishing Sejanus. Popularity Jonson craved, though he seems to have grown more concerned that his reputation as a tragedian be secured by meritorious works of scholarship based upon the precepts of the ancients rather than upon popular approval. This attitude is implied in the short critical essay on the origins of his tragic style "To the Readers". Jonson's scorning of public judgement is suggested in the same place, though a more pointed statement occurs in "To the Reader in Ordinairie" prefacing Catiline His Conspiracy.[3]

The play was first performed in 1603 as stated on the title page of the Folio edition of 1616. The exact time of the year is conjectural. Sir E. K. Chambers speculates that it was first seen at court since the theaters were closed because of the plague which reached epidemic proportions in May of that year.[4] But the crucial

performance, whether the first or the second, was at the Globe theater in the autumn of 1603. The play could have had no better chance to please, yet it failed to do so and that failure has become one of the incontrovertible facts of its history. Jonson's own dedication to Lord Aubigny testifies to this failure on the stage but it is not the only testimony. Proof of failure is clearly implied in the "Gratulatory Verse" prefixed to the Quarto. In "To the most understanding Poet" the writer commends the work which cost Jonson so much labor and turns with indignation upon the base tastes of the audience which failed to appreciate his efforts, confident that the publication would set Jonson's work free from their "beastly rage" and that the crowds would be "damned" for "their Ignorance." He implies that Sejanus is a worthy work above others in excellence almost directly in proportion to its failure in the theater. Jonson's aims were too lofty for the hordes; popularity, itself, would have been an insult.[5] Sejanus, despite its classicism and high seriousness, made a bid for popularity that failed. Popular appeal could have been difficult to achieve by a play too precisely structured upon the unities and the classical chorus; Jonson knew it, admitted it in his "To the Readers" and at the risk of writing no "true poem" sacrificed these "laws". But such concessions hardly appeased the audience. They had their point, of course, if spectacle, psychological character study, comic relief, and great emotional sweeps of pity and fear are essential to the tragic experience. Potential directors of later years must have had similar doubts concerning the play's theatricality, since a stage history of Sejanus is virtually completed by a reference to the production by William Poel (see Appendix A). In short, the play has found little favor in the theater and every editor has felt the need to explain the effect this has had

upon the critical reputation of the work.

There is no indication that the work failed initially in the theater because it offended magistrates or spoke treason, satirized some public figure too openly, or drew parallels between Rome and England. Apparently for the first audience, objections came down to a matter of surface characteristics, the length of the speeches, the tediousness of the rhetoric, the perhaps confusing copiousness of the cast, the historical distance, the lack of obvious spectacle. Robert Noyes confesses that a few readers have recognized Jonson's genius in this tragedy, but always as readers, implying that Sejanus succeeds only as a kind of closet drama. Others have admitted the fine poetry to be found in Sejanus but this is to say almost by definition that it is a bad performing play.[6] Leonard Digges' poem "Upon Master William Shakespeare" is often quoted as representing the sentiments of those theater-goers who were enchanted by Shakespeare's characters when "they vvould not brooke a line,/Of tedious (though well laboured) Catilines (sic)" and who felt that "Sejanus too vvas irkesome."[7] Edmond Gayton, referring to the Alchemist in 1654, reached the conclusion that its difficulties in the theater arose because "men come not to study at a Play-house, but love such expressions and passages, which with ease insinuate themselves into their capacities."[8] The diversions Jonson offered were too easily swamped by the intellectual responses he called for simultaneously. Two modern critics, A. W. Ward and J. A. Bryant Jr., both regard Sejanus as a theatrical miscalculation. Jonson placed too many demands upon his audience.[9] The play's theatrical history bears that out no matter how much of the onus may be placed back on the audiences themselves. A writer is simply limited in the amount of responsibilities he can safely place upon his audiences if popularity is his goal.

Jonson wrote Sejanus at that period in his career when the so-called war of the theaters dampened his enthusiasm for publicity. Audiences had not been kind to The Poetaster and friends had not been kind to Jonson. This is the popular biographical reason for supposing that he withdrew to write his scholarly play, a thing to "be sung, high, and aloofe,/Safe from the wolues black iaw, and the dull asses hoofe."[10] The passage indicates a kind of contempt for the audience with the suggestion that true tragedy was beyond their understanding and sensibilities. It appears that Jonson set out to write a play which would thrash the audience's stupidity with its formidible competence. Coupled to his own testimony is the familiar journal entry of Manningham, a law student, who wrote that as of February 12, 1603 "'ben Jonson the poet nowe lives upon one Tounsend and scornes the world.'" (Quoted from Works, II, 3). But Sejanus is more than a pedantic attack upon ignorance by a sour playwright. Jonson had already brought a new form of comedy to the boards. This play reveals a similar kind of innovative genius on his part as tragedian.

The printed version of the play in 1605 is a sequel to the stage failure. Jonson published Sejanus so that in printed form it could reflect upon the judgement of those who had rejected it first in the theater. He implied all this in the dedication to Lord Aubigny.[11] Yet the publication was not straightforward. The play was not registered until November 2, 1604 by Edward Blount. For reasons unknown it was passed on to Thomas Thorp who entered it a second time on the Stationers' Register on August 6, 1605, almost two years after its performance. Jonson required time for revisions. He informs us that his "book, in all numbers, is not the same with that which was acted on the public stage, wherein a second pen had a good share; in place of which I have rather chosen to put weaker (and no doubt less pleasing)

of mine own, than to defraud so happy a genius of his right by my loathed usurpation." ("To the Readers", 39-44).[12] Identification of that other hand has been a favorite sport with past critics but little is gained by rehearsing the evidence for Shakespeare or Fletcher or Chapman. It is amusing to note that if Jonson scorned the world in 1603 he did so with a collaborator and that another writer in the age must have shared a few of his ideas about historical tragedy. The extent of Jonson's revisions can never be known and the play which died in the theater may not be at all like the one we have. The first Sejanus may have been a far greater compromise with popular drama and the alterations toward closet drama may have been provided for the printed version - appropriately enough since Jonson knew he was writing for a different medium.

Further impediments to publication may be attributed to the charges of treason brought against Jonson by Northampton. Jonson was taken before the Privy Council and questioned about certain passages in the play which pointed too directly at modern times and public figures. Apparently the charges were not serious or at any rate dangerous, because Jonson was not imprisoned. William Drummond recorded Jonson's jaunty comment upon the event in his Conversations: "Northampton was his mortall enimie for brauling, on a St Georges day, one of his attenders, he was called before the Councell for his Sejanus, and accused both of popperie and treason by him."[13] Herford and Simpson have looked into Northampton's character and his political affiliations, discovering that he was a Howard and therefore a Catholic, though favored at court and eager to deny Catholic sympathies. Thus, he was probably using Jonson for political reasons for, to attack Jonson who was a known Catholic, was a way of clearing himself of suspicion (Works, I, 37).

It is not unlikely that Jonson had beaten a servant of his and that Northampton simply bided his time and took out his revengein this way. Yet such a proceeding could have held-up the publication of the play until Jonson had been acquitted of the accusations.

By the end of 1604 Jonson was again friends with Marston for he, Marston, and Chapman collaborated upon a play entitled Eastward Hoe resulting in a prison sentence which lasted for several months. Letters directed to various people in high places pleading for intervention for their release extended over the period from May 4 to September 4, 1605. Sejanus was first registered at the beginning of this adventure and was not re-registered until a month before the release and printed before the Gunpowder Plot which once again involved Jonson in political affairs.

Jonson appears almost to have expected failure before he began Sejanus. After The Poetaster he determined to return to tragedy. "Her fauours in my next I will pursue,/Where, if I proue the pleasure but of one,/So he iudicious be; He shall b'alone/A Theatre vnto me."[14] If Jonson meant this, he was hardly in the best state of mind for creating a play aiming for the "preservation of ... popular delight." ("To the Readers," lines 12-13). Rather he appears to have been fully aware that the play within him which required writing and deserved an audience would also make demands beyond the general capacity. Such "failures" are often more important than successes. One wants to know what those criteria and principles were which caused a writer of Jonson's calibre to labor, for a significant period of time, on a work he had virtually foredoomed. Critics may be divided according to those who weight the significance of the play's failure in the theater and those who believe with Jonson that the opinion of the "public" is irrelevant. In order to come to terms with the play it is necessary to

see it in a context of political and historical thought and in terms of the future of the history play in 1603, rather than in terms of the play's meagre theater history. Jonson's criteria of composition led him to the creation of a work which is an achievement historiographically and politically, a play virtually about the limits of the drama. Too much concern for the theatrical failure has, I think, delayed that discovery.

## II

## The Problem and the Critics

Sejanus has frequently been cited by critics for individual achievements. Dryden admired Jonson for keeping the rules. Coleridge respected him for writing reliably of antiquity. L. C. Knights has found in the play a sense of the moral tradition which is created by a careful crafting of satiric verse. Eliot admired the work for its original insights into the hard polish of political and social institutions, the life of the surface, the world of postures and cardboard faces. Here was a "contemporary Jonson ... who would arouse the enthusiasm of the intelligentsia."[15] Ralph Nash makes a case for the tradition of the Renaissance tragic poem citing Sejanus as the "kind of tragedy that the Renaissance ought logically to produce."[16] The play is non-classical and non-Shakespearean, concerned as it is with politics, rhetoric and the idea of the State. It may be argued, on theoretical grounds, that tragedy requires no hero, that characters are created to serve the illustration of a situation. Jonson's characters may be described as conforming to the "classical-Renaissance predilection for simplifying generalizations about political types and motives for political conduct."[17] Yet the play is almost

never celebrated as an unqualified success. Critics have invariably discovered that something crucial went wrong, that the play does not achieve what it should as a tragedy, though there is no agreement by any means, on what that error is. Even as a reading play it fails to satisfy completely. In the light of Jonson's usual competancy, one wonders why. The brief summary of the criticism to follow is offered not only to indicate the variety of the play's shortcomings as raised by the critics, but to set out the range of concerns to be dealt with in the following chapters.

The Victorians and certain critics early in this century have faulted Jonson for his scientific turn of mind, his lack of human sympathy, pity, lyric effusion, attributing it to a half-formed temperament. "Jonson lacked the qualifications required of a writer of great tragedy ... "[18] J. A. Symonds missed the "grace, subtlety, emotion, suggestiveness" all sacrificed to "scholarly solidity". Swinburne missed the music, the "singing power" the "fragrance" in Jonson's verse.[19] Tragedy for them was essentially a romantic and emotional business. Yet even recent critics have attributed Jonson's failure to a lack of qualities. "Jonson had no genius for tragedy"; in dealing with history "Jonson had nothing to say." In fact, "there is no pressure behind the writing."[20] But here I detect too great an eagerness on the part of the critic to celebrate what he thought to be an incontestable catastrophe. Later, more analytic critics, have implied that Jonson was a man struggling against himself in matters of historical interpretation, politics, and literary style. Herford and Simpson, with their usual lucidity, lay open the issue. Jonson was driven by neo-classical critical doctrines, yet the historian in him sought for authority and fidelity, while the dramatist imposed certain

compromises in order to gain some success in the theaters. The result was a keen conflict. "It was not new, for the combination of Elizabethan stage-instinct, historic erudition, and classicist doctrine was bound to produce it; but this combination had always been rare, and certainly never occurred in a mind where all three elements were so potent and so well matched as in Jonson's."[21] It would appear that the various labors of Jonson the neo-classical critic, politician, satirist, popular dramatist and historian could not be drawn up equally into a single work. Jonson simply operated by too many literary and scholarly criteria at once. His self-consciousness as a creator too often interfered with the effects which a more intuitive approach might have supplied. Certainly it is an explanation, but more in terms of setting up a problem than in solving it. Herford and Simpson merely point out the variety of sources and interests which inform the play; they indicate the scope of study required to explain the whole foundation of the work. It is in coming to terms with the play as a synthesis of disciplines that most critics have failed Sejanus. Herford and Simpson were on the right track.

By all appearances history as a discipline makes exactions upon the writer which are barely, if at all, reconcilable to the ideals of the artist as neo-classicist and either lend themselves particularly well to the creation of popular drama. In so far as the critic is to make one thing of the play, he must choose a pre dominate mode and defend the play as a "would-be" pure drama either of a conventional variety, such as De casibus tragedy or as an innovative work which Jonson failed to perfect. Ornstein remarks that Jonson failed because he adhered so closely to the materials of history. Tacitus' tough Machiavellean narrative lacked the concise and conventional patterns of moral certainty.

Tacitus was too compelling, crippling the artist with his cynicism. Jonson was unable to convert history fully into art. History itself contains tragic events but they "may lack moral significance or resolution."[22] For Ornstein, the artist must supply a moral vision or fail to fulfil one of the first requirements of art in consequence. In following history Jonson forfeited his moral fable. It was not within the range of possibilities Ornstein could allow that Jonson intended to provide the sense of the tragic which emerges from political paradox and ideological frustration. T. S. Eliot took the opposite view. From history, alone, Jonson derived the strength of his work. It was neither his scholarship nor his use of classical sources which marred the play. It was due to the fact that Jonson was not content to write a strictly classical imitation, but attempted to make it more familiar by superimposing upon his materials the stock De casibus motives of earlier popular English tragedy. The fall of princes, as a moral order, has nothing to do with the political order derived from Tacitus. It was badly grafted on, a miscalculation which, once penetrated, allowed Eliot to praise what almost came to pass. "Jonson did not write a good tragedy, but we can see no reason why he should not have written one."[23] For the "general audience", there was too little spectacle; the play was too erudite. But for the neo-classical critic, Jonson advanced too far in the direction of popular drama, offering violence on stage in the death of Silius, a crowded cast, touches of satiric invedtive, and humor (Dryden called the play an "oleo", a mixture of tragedy and comedy) eliminated the chorus and took liberties with the unities.[24] As a result "he fell between two stools, losing the bold, if dangerous, scope which the popular playwrights claimed, without gaining the advantages of the tightly restricted and concentrated neo-classicism of the closet

dramatists."[25] Jonson failed in combining classical standards with the native drama.

Still other critics have approached Sejanus essentially as a context for the treatment of characters, categorizing the play in terms of its concept of the hero. Clarence Boyer faults the play because Tiberius is too weak and because there is little difference between Sejanus and the Elizabethan villain as a type-character. He lacks meanness and grandeur: "he is all fox and no lion."[26] Boyer does not correlate the creation of character with the political roles they portrayed. The character approach inevitably leads back to discussions of traditional morals, psychological complexity, the De casibus fall, the moral exemplum, Aristotle and tragic poetics, the definition of the hero as the definition of tragedy.

For W. F. Bolton Sejanus is not only a play about the fall of princes and men baffled by the "fickle face of Fortune" but a study of larger symbolic cycles which include "analogies of the vegetable year and the solar day."[27] Sejanus imparts a meditation on constancy and humility such as they were urged by Lipsius and John Stradling. Bolton landed upon this thesis in his search for the principles of good in the play since without them the work would have lacked all dramatic conflict. It is a reading totally bound up with literary ideals and conventions. Robert E. Knoll is equally commited to the discovery of moral forms. For him Sejanus is a classical work, yet an "apotheosis of native classicism" that is "as deeply English as it is manifestly Latin", a "medieval tragedy only festooned with Senecan drapery." Sejanus is a moral essay on the medieval sin of arrogance, thus removing the play from secular political traditions. The moral is that "the rewards of the world are uncertain and the ways of God inscrutable." Knoll, caught in his thesis, is drawn to conclude that

Tiberius is therefore God's anointed and the Germanicans rebellious. "In resisting the emperor, the Germanicans do not trust God." Silius is rash in his suicide before Tiberius the carrier of God's justice.[28] It is a strange mixture of the orthodox Tudor political homily with tendencies toward Christian Stoicism.

In most of these critical assessments there is an awareness that the origins of the play are compound, that Jonson intended to fuse a variety of disciplines and traditions, native and classical, literary and non-literary and failed - possibly because he attempted to accomplish too much. The imperfections in the play are traceable to Jonson's inability to choose one ascendant discipline and doctrine to which all others would be subordinated. Some critics have faulted him there and stopped. Others have persisted in the search for the unifying principle, or prevailing intent, offering with varying degrees of cogency in the proofs, Jonson's reliance upon modified Artistotelian "rules", the revival of the Roman play, his more exact (though always literary) use of history, the tragedy of the villain-hero, the satirical-tragic contest between two evil knaves, the tragedy of mutability and waste, an exhortation in humility and Christian Stoicism. Each has a degree of relevancy; none thoroughly convinces that it is the dominating principle.

It has been assumed by almost all of the writers on Sejanus that Jonson, in designing the play, had only literary criteria in mind, that the political and historical concerns, no matter how sophisticated, were adopted and employed in a strictly art-making process. Una Ellis-Fermor is virtually alone in positing that there is "a deeply inherent non-dramatic principle in him, and this offers at least one way of approach to the multifarious aesthetic problems of his work."[29]

The way to begin is with the influencial non-dramatic disciplines, Roman history and Renaissance historiographical methods, followed by a general inquiry into the role and future of the Roman play as a political voice in the seventeenth-century. One must then correlate the dramatic forms inherent in this non-dramatic material with the structure of the play, and measure the degree to which this material obligates the artist according to its own integrity of order, purposes, themes. If then, in following political history the writer rediscovers patterns and themes similar to the conventional literary ones, he revalidates them. But such patterns have the distinction of being recovered from the "realities," purposes and narrative techniques of the political historian. The results can be deceptive; emphases are often changed. That is where the critic, basing his assessments on literary criteria alone, is at a great disadvantage. He assumes that the premises of the play are the same as his own. But the literary tradition, in the case of Sejanus, is probably the least useful point of departure for discovering the principles upon which Jonson relied for imparting a structural and thematic coherence to the play.

This is not a thesis in a vacuum, however, since in the last few years several studies (but three in particular) have appeared in which Marlowe, the Jacobean Shakespeare and the few turn-of-the-century Roman plays have been reconsidered as political treatises first, even by way of coming to terms with their literary origins.[30] These works are part of a larger revolt against the concept of Tudor England as a period defined and guided by a body of fixed ideas including the absolute and incontestable nature of the monarchy, the given order of the social hierarchy and the divinely providential control of history. Such views have been challenged because they were challenged in their own times. The tendency in these studies is to see the period as one of fluxuating ideologies, emerging political and social ideas, an age constituted in religious and political paradoxes, all of which are reflected

in certain literary works of the age, suggesting that these works, even the most "orthadox" were not always foregone confirmations of the so-called Tudor world order. Rather these works participated in a multi-dimensional and sometimes confused dialogue especially in matters concerning mixed government, tyranny, civil rights, the constitution and the people's contract, rebellion, mob power, the role of the aristocracy, the upstart politician, violations of the law and treason. This concern with the drama's place in the intellectual revolution in the seventeenth century is relatively recent but definitely "in the air". It is a line of inquiry not only useful but essential in understanding the origins and purposes of Sejanus.

In The Tragedy of State J. W. Lever discusses those plays which are predominantly concerned with the problems and destinies of states. Individual characters, with their flaws or perfections, deserve only a secondary notice. It is in the state, itself, that the faults and strengths exist which shape human courses. Fortune, causally accounted for, takes the form of political forces, mob rule, misalliances in government, contradictory constitutional theories. These plays introduce a revival of Roman stoicism as a means for enduring the rise and fall of political regimes. The political victim emerges, a new type of character, when the uses of power and policy are the central issues. Lever sees in the Roman plays of Jonson and Chapman a pessimism resulting from a fear of overweening absolutism. Such works differ markedly from the "English history play which dramatized material taken from the sixteenth-century chronicles."[31]

Huffman in "Coriolanus" in Context argues that critics have underestimated the ability of the Jacobean mind to comprehend political subtleties and that Shakespeare's audience understood something more

significant by the use of the Roman setting than England mechanically paralleled. The pervasive political foundations of Coriolanus and other non-Shakespearean Roman plays have gone unappreciated because they have not been considered in their historical contexts and in terms of contemporary English and continental political thought. Huffman, too, recognizes that the orthodox Tudor views on matters of Order and Degree are too narrow and antiquated for the purposes of discussing political thought.[32] There was a recognition early in the seventeenth century that tyranny and "divine right" absolutism were growing threats; the Roman plays, more than any other, addressed themselves to the problem. Jacobean intellectuals, though cautiously, were showing a greater interest in republicanism and mixed government in all its forms - an interest reflected in Coriolanus. The mood is present in Sejanus as well.

A few of Sejanus' recent critics have initiated a discussion of the play as a political work, often incidentally and never with the intent of explaining the origins of Jonson's tragic style in terms of his historical and political intentions. There is a surprising lack of reference to Tacitus and little comment upon historiographical methods with the exception that Jonson followed the Italian critics in making his tragedy also historically true. Nothing like a comprehensive view has appeared. But earlier readers of the play have, by no means, been unaware of the problem.

J. A. Bryant Jr. has elaborated on Jonson's assertion in "To the Readers" that "truth of argument" is essential to tragedy. Puritan complaints against the poet as "liar" may have caused Jonson to make more rigorous use of his source materials in order to add authority to his play. Sejanus was an effort to reunite the literal truth of history with the essential truths of poetry. Bryant accepts the terrible fall of an insolent knave as a true historical pattern.

Yet, in the final analysis, Bryant does not put much confidence in the audience's historical sophistication. He sees the play not as an accessible political argument but an exercise in historical memory which overtaxes its audience.[33]

Daniel Boughner has written the only critique of the play which is expressly concerned with political interpretation, though it is concerned essentially with policy and the statesman's techniques rather than with constitutional issues. For him, Sejanus is a discourse on Machiavellianism. Tiberius is a study in the policy required by a prince to protect himself from wily predators. The primary action of the play is a contest between two Titan politicians. Huffman believes that the Roman plays were inspired, often, by republican sympathies; Boughner contends to the contrary that "from the Annals to Sejanus we go from the horrors of tyranny to the horror of tyrannicide." This is the telling alteration which Jonson made to his source. The play is a hard-line defense of monarchy, a tougher version of Tudor orthodoxy. The "Tacitean monster emerges as the successful Machiavellian prince whose conduct of the duel and whose defensive skill in dissimulation arouse a sardonic admiration." Arruntius is merely a confused babbler. The thesis originates with Boughner's conviction that Jonson admired Machiavellian tactics and introduced them frequently into the play. But in choosing only the "horror of tyrannicide" to the exclusion of the "horrors of tyranny" half the dialogue is stricken out. The regrets, paradoxes, political debate, problems of loyalty to be found both in Tacitus and Jonson are overlooked.[34]

Michael J. C. Echeruo takes a middle course on the political question, viewing Catiline as a balance between "blatant Machiavellian cynicism" and "moral pretentiousness." The distinctions made are still

moral matters primarily rather than constitutional ones. 'The tragedy of politics, in Jonson's view of it, derives from his disenchantment with the whole process of 'Policy' or 'Arte' which required that the state should survive, paradoxically, only by the travesty of the values by which, indeed, it ultimately hoped to survive." This is a useful statement of the political paradox. Moreover, Scheruo recognizes that Catiline is concerned, not with the individual or with the state, but with the "conscience of politics."[35] His discussion is useful for a consideration of Sejanus because it hints at the relationship between dramatic action and the play as a political treatise.

Jacob De Villiers joins with Ornstein in lamenting Jonson's reticence to deal forthrightly with political issues and to take sides on political questions. The dramatized rehearsal of the horrors of first century Rome lacks that moral vision. The downward spiral of the society Jonson depicted, is so "pathetic that it horrifies." The "extreme deterioration carries no conviction." Moreover, the fall of the hero is "conventional and without conviction as well." A lack of cogency in both areas indicates, on Jonson's part a "loss of integrity, or else mere inability."[36] De Villiers does not see the moral nature of the historiographical achievement itself, the accuracy of Jonson's Roman world, nor does he detect the moral obligation of the artist to reflect paradoxes and ideological conflicts such as he finds them fixed in the causes of historical events and manifested in the results. Here is where such a work as Rosalie Colie's Paradoxia Epidemica offers a valuable corrective. Admittedly she was referring to ontological, rhetorical and epistemological paradoxes when she stated that a "rich tradition of highly developed paradoxes (was) available for use by Renaissance authors" and that the tradition predated the poems which housed it and was there for exploitation.[37] But the principle holds

true for political matters as well. Paradox is not merely a literary invention of style. Paradox emerges rhetorically (or dramatically) in works based upon the paradoxes which are part of the intellectual, social and political milieu.

K. M. Burton attacks Jonson's performance in Sejanus for reasons opposite to De Villiers. For her, Jonson was too morally and thematically orientated. He tried too hard to make his social and political criticism plain and pointed, whereby he lost the subtlety which comes with indirection and reticence. Burton argues that as a political tragedian Jonson intended to evoke a sense of public shame as the final tragic emotion, the result of the citizens' failure to halt the political decline of Rome. This is to convey what the mob in the play should have felt to the mob in the theater. Whether shame can replace Aristotelian responses is debatable. Yet this response has the advantage of growing out of a demonstrable political paradox; the dramatic action shows the destructive courses run by tyrants against "the corrupt society which engendered them."[38] Burton believes that shame, as the tragic emotion, is sufficient. Such tragedies cannot be judged by superimposed dramatic patterns or values either Senecan or Aristotelian. Both Chapman and Jonson, though too overtly didactic in their approaches, nevertheless devised a political tragedy in which state structures and issues gave rise to tragic forms. The suggestion that an assessment of Sejanus should be freed from the formal regulations of Seneca and Aristotle is a positive move in the right direction.

~~But the actual political "argument" of Sejanus has not been fully identified, that thought-pattern which was free from fixed values and at liberty to challenge orthodox beliefs.~~

Such a play world Jonson developed in response to the political crisis described in Tacitus. It is not canned political wisdom which

one finds in the play but developing political thought. "Politics is germane to a remarkable percentage of Tudor plays, but in terms of ideas and platforms rather than personalities."[39] The difficulty encountered by the dramatist in finding a structure suited for the portrayal of political situations rather than for the portrayal of heroes is matched by the critic's inability to perceive that intention. Despite vestiges of the hero-centric drama and its characteristic organization, Sejanus reveals those political intentions more clearly - established as they are within a thematic structure of their own. Jonson goes far in solving the compositional problems involved in setting out political history in a dramatic form. Crucial matters require clarification; the interpretative bent of the play, the relationship between Sejanus and its sources, the function of verifiable history and the definition of the work as tragedy.

## III

## The Order of the Play

Roman political history was replete with parties, factions, alliances ever changing according to events and advantages. The dramatist desiring to treat such history has no small challenge in getting his exposition in order, ideally as a panoply of those necessary facts and relations even while the dramatic action goes forward. The characters in Sejanus, with few exceptions, are public figures, revealed in their political roles, identified according to their loyalties: "Is he Drusian, or Germanican?/Or ours, or neutral?" (I. 80-81). That was the measure of every man. As the play opens Silius and Sabinus, two of the deceased Germanicus' loyal followers, discuss the corruptions of the court with special reference to parasites and spies, two of

whom dog them throughout the scene. A kind of police-state atmosphere is early in the making. These spies are Sejanus' "clients" seeking rewards from an ascending politician; they are men who know how to "Flatter, and swear, forswear, deprave, inform/Smile, and betray;" (I. 28-29). Beginning with the petty knaves the exposition mounts toward the introduction of "minion" Sejanus and the Emperor Tiberius whose mysterious will rules in the form of politic secrecy and indirection. Both are men involved in the life of state personally, yet actors in a grand constitutional crisis. On the other side is the Senate whose moral and political strength has been sapped by apathy and servility. Arruntius, a noble old Senator, is the first to confess that they half enslaved themselves by their own vices. "here they failed themselves the Imperium took over, usurping the powers of men who were once the "Free, equal lords of the triumphèd world," (I. 60). For their self-awareness, moral integrity and fortitude Arruntius, Silius and Sabinus are rare exceptions even in their own senatorial class, and thus gain a special confidence from the viewer. Their recollections of Germanicus, Cato and Brutus express their ideals. The lives of the noble republicans set the moral standards for the play. Germanicus' death was a catalyst to later political events. Tiberius, envious of Germanicus' popularity, had him poisoned. But Germanicus' strong-willed wife, mother to the next legal heirs to the throne, survived to seek revenge for his death. Here were the grounds for a dynastic feud superimposed upon and rechannelling the constitutional struggle. Swiftly Jonson establishes the parties, the reasons for conflict, the attitudes of the participants and the techniques to be employed. Meanwhile, Sejanus took advantage of these general circumstances to gain the Emperor's favor, ostensibly as his aid and counsellor. Behind this action was his own plot to become Emperor. He worked

according to his own scheme to eliminate all the legal heirs to the throne. Tiberius tolerated it, perhaps blindly, perhaps politically in order to make his own position safe from Agrippina. Sejanus initiated an insidious program which resulted in the virtual destruction of the Roman intelligentsia.

Sejanus first appears surrounded by parasites seeking offices for bribes. He treats them disdainfully, meanwhile arranging a love tryst with the crown-prince's wife through her physician (I. 269-366). It is the first step in his plan to have Drusus murdered. Tiberius effects a similar entrance flocked by petitioners and flatterers, all the while feigning annoyance with their obsequiousness (I. 375-99). His plants are always there to restore the powers and dignity he gives away in show. It was his technique for handling the entire Senate. Possessing all real and coercive powers, only popular approval remained to be gained. From the outset Tiberius is a figure to be charted through a haze of rhetoric and dissimulation. His motives are secluded, his intentions covert. His character is revealed through his words, though Silius and Arruntius are frequent interpreters as in this scene (I. 400-24; 425-29), marking the distance between his statements and his true intentions.

In the second act Sejanus achieves his goal with Livia in a parody of a courtship which is half romantic, "I protest/Myself through-rarefied, and turned all flame/In your affection" (II. 31-33), and half sheer policy, playing, as he does, upon her ambition to "share the sov'reignty of all the world." (II. 37). Jonson's sardonic irony is perceptible throughout the exchange. The results are that within a few minutes Livia is prepared for murder as well as love. Drusus is poisoned by his cup-bearer and Sejanus is free to initiate his attack upon Agrippina and the Claudian line of heirs. In a meeting between the Emperor and his agent, Tiberius plays coy while Sejanus, encouraged by his statement of fear, proposes a swift attack upon

the Germanicans beforethey have time to mobilize. The third and fourth acts see that plot carried nearly to its conclusion. Silius, who had fought nobly for Rome, was accused of treason on the trumped-up charge that he had boasted in private that Rome's security had been his accomplishment alone (III. 269-82). Silius knew that he was foredoomed, that the laws were unjustly used against him and that death was his only course. He did not make that exit without striking directly at the source of the fraud - Tiberius' own tacit permission (III. 209; 335-39). Cordus was called after him to defend himself as an historian from the charge that in his writings he attacked the present age (III. 384-85). It was a touchstone hearing both for Tacitus and for Jonson. The future of intellectual freedom was in the balance. With the decision to burn Cordus' books, following his brilliant, though sophistic, defense, there was an unmistakeble indication of what was to come.

The remaining Germanicans gather briefly at the opening of act four to take stock of their losses as a party and as a family. Agrippina is fully cognizant of the threat; "Let me not fear, that cannot hope." (IV. 7). The entire scene is an essay on honorable retreat. Though the distance between characters and audience is great, yet there is a growing doom and frustration here which is compelling. Agrippina is reduced to self-prostitution or certain defeat. The numbers lost are named over: Silius, Sosia, Claudia Pulchra, Furnius (IV. 20-22). She anticipates the next step, the elimination of her sons and prepares them for violence with the exhortation to be noble as she has been since, "What we do know will come, we should not fear." (IV. 76).

Meanwhile, the audience has been included in the Emperor's compound plot to remove Sejanus at an opportune moment through the

employment of Macro. History substantiates the irony; Macro is no force for the good. He is simply one more in the parade of opportunists who "will not ask why Caesar bids do this,/But joy that he bids ... " (III. 714-15). It is a kind of literary counter-plot, but it is also based on a principle of policy. Political power-struggles do not follow courses of good and evil, but their own principles of power and defeat. Tiberius knew Macro to be "subtle, close, wise, and well read/In man and his large nature." (III. 694-95). Macro knew how to apply himself in order to rise by doing the Emperor's dirty work and bearing the necessary opprobrium should anything go wrong. It was a principle Sejanus at one time understood (III. 586-95), but too easily forgot in his overconfidence. Sejanus' protection of Tiberius against falling debris perhaps earned him a stay of execution, but Macro, once set in motion, could hardly risk his full return to favor. It was an incitement to his own counter-attack (IV. 76-92). Jonson spells out dramatically the multifarious angles of political policy and ambition.

In the fourth act Sabinus is lured to his death by Latiaris, one of Sejanus' agents and two accomplices who hide "between the roof and ceiling" to act as witnesses once Sabinus utters a treasonous word. Latiaris chatters in a friendly confidential way about the decadent conditions of Rome, urges rebellion and a struggle for liberty (IV. 142-161). Sabinus is patently no rebel and clearly states as much, "They must be patient, so must we." (IV. 127). But on the subject of Tiberius' personal debauchery Sabinus offers criticism. It is treason. The spies descend and he is whisked away to death on the gemonies (IV. 283-87). Ironically Latiaris' own questions, employed in baiting the republican senator, best express the conditions of Rome at that moment,

When ignorance is scarcely innocence,
And knowledge made a capital offense?
When not so much but the bare empty shade
Of liberty is reft us? And we made
The prey to greedy vultures and vile spies,
That first transfix us with their murdering eyes?

(IV. 136-41)

Though the tide turns against Sejanus in the last act, yet the condition of Rome does not improve. Sejanus, swelled by his own confidence and in spite of Tiberius' puzzling letters from Capree, vaunts in his successes. Ill omensbegin to appear; smoke from his statue, a serpent lurking inside (V. 24-56). Sejanus is prevailed upon by his followers to sacrifice to the gods. Macro meanwhile prepares the guard for action at the senate house. The image on the altar only stirs and turns away, "Fortune averts her face!" (V. 186). Sejanus in a rage overturns all. Jonson pursues the irony to the very end. Sejanus, at last in doubt begins to court those whom he had scorned, "Fortune, I see thy worst." (V. 236). Thoughts of death occur to him but only in a larger context of self-satisfaction. Unable to believe that fortune would carry him so far without assuring him victory, yet Sejanus, should he fail even then, can count his triumphs as "great enough". "All Rome hath been my slave." (V. 256). Sejanus defeated can hardly make up for the havoc he had created. News of a proposed preferment momentarily restores Sejanus' confidence. Again he turns upon his followers who are quick to note that he is motivated entirely by self interest. "Aye, he is wise, will make him friends/Of such who never love but for their ends." (V. 429-30) The Sejanus mystique for political reasons has rapidly thinned.

Sejanus is finally destroyed by Tiberius' even more cunning use of rhetoric and sheer politic enigma with the aid of Macro's practical shrewdness. Sejanus turns a gullible fool when Macro explains the senate's irregular convening as the occasion to make him a tribune.

A scene of flattery and fawning ensues as Sejanus makes his way to the Senate-house. Tiberius' shifty letter is read out; justice is put aside. The senators, discomfited by the Emperor's vacillation, are eager to catch the latest trends in order to stay in favor. Sejanus' fate rides on rhetorical figures until Tiberius' bent is clear. Then Sejanus' own followers vie with one another to be the first to call for punishment: "Take him hence/Hence! To the dungeon with him! He deserves it." (V. 688-89). The rest is a flurry of mob viciousness and cruelty. The play builds on a thematic if not a dramatic crescendo. Sejanus is passed down through the ranks of society, not quite a scapegoat, not quite a victim to be pitied, till he is shredded, carried all over the city and buried, "Each little dust covers a little part." (V. 831). But the weight of the argument turns upon an indictment of the mobs and fixes, tableau-like, the chaos Sejanus brought to Rome and the chaos Rome brought upon herself, in the end unpurged and further threatened by Macro and the reorganization of a new band of ambitious opportunists (V. 750-53).

## Footnotes

1. Francis Meres, Palladis Tamia (London, 1598), p. 283.

2. W. W. Greg states in his commentary on Henslowe's Diary that Jonson seems to have written only for the Admiral's company "the only one with which the Diary connects him." (London, 1908), II, 289. No specific titles appear before Hot Anger soon Cold (1598), but later titles, Page of Plymouth, Robert II, and Richard Crookback, mostly written in collaboration with others, suggest Jonson's kind of activity.

3. Ben Jonson, Works, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson, 11 ols (Oxford, 1925-1952), V. 432, hereafter cited as Works.

4. The Elizabethan Stage, 4 vols (Oxford, 1923), III, 367.

5. This dedication and the commendatory verses were reproduced from the Quarto of 1605 in the edition of Sejanus, ed. W. D. Briggs (Boston, 1911), pp. 3-21 (Ev.B., p. 21).

6. Ben Jonson on the English Stage 1660-1776 (New York, 1966; first pub. 1935), p. 301.

7. Poems: Written by Wil Shake-speare. Gent (London, 1640; reprinted London, 1885), *3v

8. Edmund Gayton, Pleasant notes upon Don Quixot (William Hunt, London, 1654), p. 271.

9. A. W. Ward, A History of English Dramatic Literature, 3 vols (London, 1899), II, 335-36; J. A. Bryant Jr., "The Significance of Ben Jonson's First Requirement for Tragedy: 'Truth of Argument," Studies in Philology, Vol. XLIX (April, 1952), p. 212.

10. Works, IV, 324 (Poetaster, "To the Reader," lines 238-39).

11. Sejanus, ed. W. D. Briggs, p. 3.

12. Sejanus, ed. Jonas Barish (New Haven, Conn., 1965), p. 28. All quotations and line references are from this edition.

13. Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden, ed. R. F. Patterson (London, 1924), p. 29.

14. Works, IV, 324 (Poetaster, "To the Reader," lines 225-28).

15. John Dryden, Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays ed. G Watson, 2 vols. (London, 1962), p. 69; S. T. Coleridge, Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Dramatists (Edinburgh, 1905), p. 275; L. C. Knights, "Tradition and Ben Jonson," Scrutiny, Vol. IV, No. 2 (Sept. 1935), 140-157; T. S. Eliot, The Sacred Wood (London, 1920), pp. 105 ff. (p. 107).

Ward, A. A. A History of English Dramatic Literature 3 vols; London, 1899
vol. 2, pp 335-6

Bryant, J.A. 'Significance of Ben Jonson's first Requirement for Tragedy'
in Studies in Philology vol XLIX (April 1952) p. 212
for remarks on Sejanus see the following

1. Dryden Of Dramatic Poesy (ed. Watson) p. 69
2. Coleridge Shk & the Elizabethan Dramatists (Edenburgh, 1905) p. 275, 135
3. Knights, L.C. 'Tradition & Ben Jonson" Scrutiny Vol 10, No. 2 Sept 1941
4. Eliot The Sacred Wood (London, 1920) pp 105 ff

Elizabeth Fermor The Jacobean Drama, 1935

Cat Line

Eckhert, M The Conscience of Politics in Jonson's Catiline'
in Studies in English Lit 1500-1900 Vol 6, No. 2 1966 pp 344

16. "Ben Jonson's Tragic Poems," Studies in Philology, Vol. LV, No. 2 (April, 1958), p. 186.

17. Nash, p. 182.

18. Gregory Smith, Ben Jonson (London, 1919), p. 186.

19. J. A. Symonds, Ben Jonson (London, 1888), p. 62; A. C. Swinburne, A Study of Ben Jonson (Lincoln, Nebr., 1969), pp. 4-5. ed. H.B Norland first pub 1889

20. Jacob I. De Villiers, "Ben Jonson's Tragedies," English Studies Vol. XLV (Dec., 1964) p. 441.

21. Works, II. 8.

22. The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy (Madison, Wisc., 1960), p. 88.

23. Eliot, p. 107.

24. John Dryden, I. 49.

25. J. B. Bamborough, Ben Jonson (London, 1970), p. 52.

26. The Villain as Hero in Elizabethan Tragedy (New York, 1964; first pub. 1914), pp. 171, 177.

27. Ben Jonson, Sejanus his Fall, ed. W. F. Bolton (London, 1966), p. xvi.

28. Robert E. Knoll, Ben Jonson's Plays; An Introduction (Lincoln, Nebr., 1964), pp. 68, 74, 78.

29. The Jacobean Drama (London, 1935), p. 100.

30. Clifford Chalmers Huffman, "Coriolanus" in Context (Cranbury, New Jersey, 1971); J. W. Lever, The Tragedy of State (London, 1971); Wilbur Sanders, The Dramatist and the Received Idea: Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare (Cambridge, 1968). (Sanders will be considered in chapter three.)

31. Lever, p. 14.

32. Huffman, pp. 23, 15.

33. "The Significance of Ben Jonson's First Requirement for Tragedy: 'Truth of Argument'," Studies in Philology, XLIX, No. 2 (April, 1952), 195-213, (pp. 209, 212).

34. "Sejanus and Machiavelli," Studies in English Literature, Vol. I. No. 2 (Spring, 1961), pp. 82, 86; also in The Devil's Disciple: Ben Jonson's Debt to Machiavelli (New York, 1968).

35. "The Conscience of Politics in Jonson's Catiline," Studies in English Literature 1500-1900, Vol. VI, No. 2 (Spring, 1966), pp. 344, 356.

36. "Ben Jonson's Tragedies," pp. 438, 437.

37. Paradoxia Epidemica; The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox (Princeton, N.J., 1966), p. vii.

38. "The Political Tragedies of Chapman and Ben Jonson," Essays in Criticism, Vol. 2. (Oct., 1952), p. 409.

39. David Bevington, Tudor Drama and Politics (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), p. 25.

## Chapter Two

## Sejanus as an Interpretation of Tacitus and the Issues of Imperial Rome

Old ethics confrontedby new conditions gave rise to a political and moral crisis in first century Rome. The history of the period was half tragic by definition. Tacitus' views on the Senate and the emperors were composite ones. Underlying his history was a welter of opinion, of experience, of public statements and private beliefs which call for commentary. There is no point in attempting to summarize the contents of the Annals, but it is necessary to attempt a description of its themes for the light they cast upon Jonson's play. Tacitus was, without question, more than a chronologer. The Annals testify to the incisive, analytic mind of the author. He was a moralist and a dramatist as well as an historian and the various criteria which directed his writing convert a factual account into a complex statement on man the political being. Tacitus wrote with seeming objectivity, yet with powerful convictions. The accomplishment of such a feat Jonson undoubtedly admired. It is my contention that Jonson was not so dull a reader as to gather from Tacitus the facts of Sejanus' fall without pausing to understand his thematic intentions. Moreover, where Tacitus is complex, obscure, contradictory, obvious, Jonson worked, in a scholarly way, to restate and interpret what he found. As a result Sejanus is not only a play based upon the Annals but an interpretation of it.

Tacitus was also a stylist of some accomplishment. Limited by the annalistic structure, he yet managed to arrange and present his materials with a remarkable degree of dramatic power, suggesting moral, satiric, and tragic attitudes. Many of the problems of style confronting Jonson

in turning history to drama, were met by Tacitus before him. Jonson's sense of the tragedy appropriate to political history could, likewise, have been derived from the Annals. Tacitus' influence is, then, two-fold. This chapter will be concerned with Roman politics, the contradictions in the constitution and all that followed by way of tyranny and corruption as Tacitus developed them in his writings. But it will also be concerned with Tacitus' concept of historiography, his style and methods to the extent that they illuminate Jonson's attitude toward history and his treatment of it in drama.

## I

Rome in the first century was a political paradox. The office of emperor was a fact, but the traditions of the republic lingered. The government, optimistically referred to as the "dyarchy", was the product of a slow development based, not on constitutional provisions and the co-operative planning of the heads of state, but rather upon a kind of unnatural balance which resulted from dynastic feuds and the subjugation of the Roman Senate. At the base of it all was the constitutional question; which were the powers delegated to the ruler, which to the Senate, and which to the people? The irony is that the Roman historians hardly ever dealt with the situation in these terms. Tacitus discussed the constitutional variables set forth by Polybius and Cicero on one occasion only, and then only to explain why that line of inquiry was futile.[1] His reluctance to discuss politics formally has been accounted for in a number of ways. It may have been fear or even a lack of interest. "We have here one of those arcana imperii, of which Tacitus speaks, which it seemed dangerous to divulge."[2]

The government, as it existed, tolerated little criticism. Descriptions seemed too like prescriptions. Because the government was not what it claimed to be, to describe it in its own professed terms could only suggest reform. Yet Tacitus is the most political of all the Roman historians. His arrangement of materials indicates a thorough understanding of political systems, their strengths and weaknesses. Tacitus, in merely relating events as he does, raises major constitutional issues.

It was Augustus' intention to convince the aristocracy that their old powers were still in force, that monarchy and oligarchy were reconcilable concepts of government. It was a form of deception which could not prevail, though Tiberius laboured throughout the first years of his reign to delegate his powers in show, so long as he might exercise them in fact.

Donald R. Dudley summarizes succintly that "The one object of Tiberius was completely to disguise his feelings, the one fear of the Senate, to show any sign of understanding him."[3] Government had come to a game of double dissembling where the men on both sides sometimes recognized discrepancies but were more often inclined, for security's sake, to accept at face value the words of the other. Tacitus' anatomy of Roman affairs is very much an exposure of the hyprocrisy upon which government relations were based.

The legacy of rule Tiberius received from Augustus was virtually an impossible one. Dissimulation and rhetoric were employed in the extreme to perpetuate the myths of constitutional monarchy. In the end he was compelled to silence the opposition by force. Every new ruler flattered the Senate in order to establish himself in power and the Senate was often gullible enough to hope for the best. But virtually every reign after Augustus' ended in terror. The fact was that the Senate had no real power. Their meetings were empty forms.

They were resentful, nostalgic, yet half reconciled to the new government which, after all, had the merit of possessing real power. "In reality indeed it was the prince who was master, the sole master; who in a more or less direct, more or less circuitous manner, according as he was more or less audacious, more or less timid, invariably did whateverhe wished."[4] That was the primary fact of first century Roman politics. Political science became an inquiry into the moods and personalities of princes, history a study in biography, the standard of measurement, the old Roman virtues.

The ruler was the representative of the office; he made it what it was. In The Histories (Bk. VIII, xxxviii), Tacitus spoke of events falling out as they did because of the "worthlessness of the emperors". History must turn its attention to the methods and practices of the rulers. "Similarly, now that Rome has virtually been transformed into an autocracy, the investigation and record of these details concerning the autocrat may prove useful." (Annals, IV, 32; Grant, p. 173). In this way Tacitus was mindful of systems. The political point of view was always there. "He had a perfect acquaintance with his country's political history; he has studied the spheres of the various magestries: he relates their origin and vicissitudes, and everywhere he mingles with general ideas accurate data, which show that he has handled public affairs and is not ignorant of their working."[5] With the maze of individual reflections on men and manners there is a cumulative view of the state. Political issues are linked with human causes. This technique is an essential aspect of the Tacitean style.

The Romans sometimes made references to a via media which offered order without enslavement and freedom without chaos, but its uses were mostly rhetorical. Ideally, the Senate had its own delegated powers while Caesar operated with absolute power in his own sphere. "Rome

had the advantage both ways: Republic and Monarchy, each in its beneficial aspect."[6] The people were represented in the Senate; the Senate in turn conferred powers upon the Emperor. According to theory, Roman emperors in the first century A.D. ruled by the consent of the people.[7] (There is, of course, a great difference between authority contracted from the people and rule by the people. Democracy was out of the question.) But there was no power structure which could maintain these ideal relationships. The emperors had emerged from the contest with the upper hand; there was little to prevent benevolent despots from becoming tyrants. The office of emperor, as an office, was secure. Only the most desperate reformers could attempt to undermine this outcome of the civil wars. But the man in office was ever subject to criticism, primarily because his powers were so undefined.[8]

Tacitus set for himself the task of finding out precisely where the new political order went wrong. The decline of the Senate was a central consideration. Because it was weak, because the memory of the Republic was dwindling, because too, Augustus' reign had been a long, peaceful and unprovoking one, and because many members of the Senate were paid off in booty and preferment to keep silent, that body lost all of its political influence, settling for a kind of lumpish security which eventually resulted in a state of servility. The Senate became the proverbial rubber-stamp whose main function was flattery. Tiberius delighted in refusing the favours they were prompted to bestow only to have them forced upon him as his "duty" by his flatterers. How this condition came about is a recurrent question, whether by the Emperor's corrupt activities or by the Senate's own fear and cowardice, whether by the loss of the old Roman virtues or the quirks of ambition which allowed Sejanus to rise in such a fashion that causal explanations are strained to their limits. Tacitus explores them all.

Tacitus begins his Annals with a summary of the reign of Augustus. He does not support the conventional belief in the Pax Romana and glowing prosperity. Augustus was a shrewd and powerful politician. He bought off the army and the mobs with gifts and cheap food. Peace he kept as a promise because he was afraid to attempt further expansion.[9] He swore to observe the traditional senatorial freedoms and to rule under the law. He was unopposed because men were either too weak or too willing to accept bribes and distinctions. From the very beginning there was a large class of men willing to accept power from the Prince because he claimed to be offering it. Each acceptance strengthened the "right" of the monarchy. Freedoms disappeared in consequence. Tiberius' reign first marked the evident change, but the patterns of corruption were already well founded (Annals, I, 9-10; Grant, pp. 38-40).

Government came to be less a matter of open dialogue and more one of diplomacy and manipulation. Augustus knew how to keep the Senate contented. Tiberius did not, primarily because the prestige of the Senate had sunk too patently for some of the more diligent members to ignore. The new security under the emperors began to lose its appeal. As resentment grew, Tiberius turned his bureaucrats against the dissatisfied. The more Tiberius offered to restore powers to the Senate, the more their pride caused them to resist accepting as a gift what had been taken from them by force.

While Tiberius tyrannized over the Senate, he was required to hire a set of retainers to protect himself against all plots, both real and alleged. There was no shortage of recruits for the job. A class of "new men" was eager to break into the power circle and willing to perform anything that was necessary. Gradually they took over the offices of the nobilites; favor was gained by pressing treason charges against the enemies of the crown. "The new men had not known liberty; they advanced through conformity with the imperial system; native

energy might not hold out against the blandishments of success or the routine habits of a bureaucratic system."[10] The theme of the novus homo is everywhere in Tacitus, but it is a complex one. He was, himself, from the same class. The difference was a matter of integrity, of entering the sheepfold by the appointed door.

The year which saw the turning point in Tiberius' career was 23 A.D. Tacitus makes special note of the fact, interested as he was in the signal events of the decline of Roman liberty. In this year, Tiberius changed his tactics from diplomacy to a purging of the opposition. Sejanus was the chief agent. There was nothing ambiguous about the outcome. He was planted upon the old senatorial faction like a slow-working fungus. A period of trials and suicides followed. A general pattern was established which took on epic proportions. The old Roman aristocracy was in the throes of death. Emperors feared rebellion while good men were reduced to a debilitating fear of their princes. Tacitus builds toward a theme which has its origins in Sejanus' rise to power and the fears which drove Tiberius to employ him.

There were grounds for Tiberius' apprehensions. He had caused them himself. Piso, directed by Tiberius' malignant envy, had successfully poisoned the paragon of virtue of that age. While he was alive, Germanicus had been a restraining influence over the Emperor. Once gone, however, Tiberius was not free from his influence. "Agrippina's actions suggest the deliberate intentions of attracting to herself a body of supporters who would exact 'vengeance' for Germanicus."[11] It was an easy step to convince Tiberius that it was an active and seething faction. Sejanus was commissioned to root it out slowly but effectively and to use his skills in covering all traces of foul play. It was a model situation for a dramatist, for in this one sequence of events the major themes

of the age were involved, the malignancy of princes, the controversy over the succession, faction and rebellion, the decline of Senatorial powers, the behaviour of the Stoics, the cruel use of the lex majestatis, the corruptibility of the class of ambitious upstarts, dynastic wars and the victimization of the innocent while the greedy rose to power. To describe these matters is not only to provide a background study to Jonson's play but to explain in their original context the issues which Jonson advanced in his political history in much the same way that Tacitus treated them in the Annals.

## II

In order to account for the allegiances in Tacitus to contradictory forms of government it is perhaps useful to digress into an account of his life. Tacitus experienced similar conditions to those he described in the Annals. In fact, he saw the near completion of that decline which began with Tiberius. He was 14 or 15 when the struggle for power took place in 69 A.D. He was born under Nero and must have known of the suffering certain members of his family endured.[12] He rose to office and distinction under Vespasian and he knew moments of respite from tyranny under Nerva. But the most productive years of his life as an active statesman were under Domitian whose reign closed in terror while the Senate, of which Tacitus was a member, sat by offering ostensible approval to the death sentences passed upon their friends.[13] Boissier conjectures that Tacitus, upon his return to Rome in 93 A.D., was in great danger, and that he made every effort to be forgotten politically in order to survive the regime.[14] In the Agricola, Tacitus stated that he had experienced the "extremes of slavery", and that Domitian's constant scrutiny of men's behaviour made men fearful and then cruel

because they dared never display weakness or incriminating sympathy with the oppressed.[15] Domitian may well have been the model for Tacitus' anatomy of the tyrant in Tiberius. Domitian patterned himself on the former Emperor, read Tiberius' journal as a guide to rulership, imitated his tactics of dissimulation, his use of clients and the treason laws. He craved flattery. Worse, was the fact that "the Emperor was very dubious whether any one was deceived by their falsehoods, and he felt the need of terrorizing people to prevent them from speaking."[16] The moral collapse experienced in the final years of Tiberius' and Nero's reigns reached a kind of climax. Domitian required no specific causes for prosecution. Philosophers were banished on principle, books were burned in quantities, espionage was rampant, in fact nearly every facet of the urbane life was obliterated and the Senate was forced to be a partner in these crimes. Domitian's rule was popular and peaceful, the mobs placated by this elimination of the troublesome intelligentsia. Republican ideals went underground. Tacitus' regard for the old standards and his hatred of Domitian's regime could have been responsible for his own inconsistencies on the principles of government. He could see clearly that republicanism had no political force, yet he was deeply committed to it as a moral tradition. Tacitus recognized in his own case the impasse reached between political and moral criteria. His standards of judgment did not fit the present facts; it was possible to condemn, but the necessity for a rulership based on realpolitik remained. There is reason to believe that Tacitus also supported these hated emperors.[17]

It is difficult to know much of the man Tacitus with certainty. The impression, in general, is that he was a moderate conservative, a "new man" whose rhetorical training qualified him for service inthe government. His moral integrity and sense of fair-play caused him to identify with the senatorial class which looked back to the days of the

Republic for its models and inspirations. He has a heavy streak of pessimism which is part of an intellectual frame of reference. There is no evidence that he was personally a gloomy man. He appears to believe that Rome was past her prime and that a course of degeneracy had begun which could be neither averted nor slowed down. The emperors had given a superficial strength to the state, but the nature of government was destructive of the moral fiber. Nevertheless, service to the state was yet the highest calling and Tacitus recognized the need for good men to serve quietly under bad emperors out of dedication to the commonweal. Like Pliny, Tacitus conducted himself with a kind of scholarly reserve (see Appendix B). For all his passionate hatred of tyranny, one senses that he was a very level-headed politician and meticulous historian.

Tacitus was trained in legal methods; he was an orator. He believed in republican liberties yet was forced by tyrannous circumstances to temporize. He was a foe to imperialism, yet publicly supported and even believed in the necessity for such a form of government. He believed in senatorial powers though he was forced to admit the existence of senatorial corruption. He was a class elitist, hated all forms of violence, was a devotee of literature, a skeptic in philosophy, dubious of all transcendental causes, held out no special hopes or cures for the empire. When men with such predispositions turn to the writing of history there will follow a unique combination of practical pessimism, nostalgic ideals, personal invective, individuality, a desire for survival under adverse circumstances, a certain amount of rhetorical cunning, an objective yet pointed view of history. Tacitus' history deals with the men who shape affairs; he scrutinizes their public

demeanors, exposes their rhetorical tricks, their legal duplicity by simply describing what was. Tacitus is not heavy-handedly bitter about the social and political changes. His style is not caustic. There are "strokes of sarcasm, fine ironies, charming subtleties of expression, stories so much the more piquant for their reluctance to seem so, in which the malice is only revealed by a passing word and lets itself be divined though unseen."[18] Where men are evil, even straightforward descriptions will look like satire.

It is to be expected that such historians will deal with the issues of government which have held sway over their lives and aroused their deepest fears. Partisanship in such cases is inevitable. They will make use of the forces of language and art in presenting those views. There will be the emotions of both the moralist and the politican in evidence. There is then the question of Tacitus' reliability as an historian. Tacitus has been accused of bias, not in his treatment of facts but in the narrowness of their selection. Tacitus is baffling on this point. He states: "I shall write without indignation or partisanship: in my case the customary incentives to these are lacking." (Annals, I, 1; Grant, p. 32). Tacitus has "proclaimed the desire to study history scientifically, to follow the inquiry into causes and their effects, as a study valuable for its own sake."[19] But at the same time Tacitus states that it is his intention to offer moral judgement. "It seems to me a historian's foremost duty to ensure that merit is recorded, and to confront evil deeds and words with the fear of posterity's denunciations." (Annals, III, 65; Grant, p. 150). The times under study contained tragic implications because evil had contaminated tne ruling classes and caused great perversions of justice. The presiding importance of this fact made a more congenial treatment inapt. Tacitus does not impose freak or invalid conceptions upon history. Study of the period and a comparison of the Annals with

other accounts testify to the reliability of Tacitus as an historian. In defense of Tacitus Syme contends that "history was like that. The events colour, infect, and dominate the historian."[20]

Nevertheless, Tacitus' judgement is always at work and we come to know what his standards are. History without such a moral intelligence present is of little use otherwise. The experiences of Tacitus' life have been set forward as grounds for his prejudices. They may be set forward equally as incentives for honesty, not only in reporting facts, but in reporting the human implications of these events. Bessie Walker said of Tacitus what might also be said of Jonson, that his work is a "reinterpretation of the past, coloured and animated by a great artist's experience of the present."[21] The emphasis is on artist and the interplay between past and present. Tacitus is always mindful of the usefulness of history. Without a sound knowledge of the past, men blunder. It is from such studies "that most men learn to distinguish right and wrong, advantage and disadvantage. Few can tell them apart instinctively." (Annals, IV. 33; Grant, p. 173). It is not a contradiction for Syme to argue that "exile or setback can be the making of an historian. Even the enhancement of a grievance will help."[22] History may be a form of consolation, or of retaliation. Troubles make a man keen if they do not destroy him. They add to his qualifications - perspective; even if a kind of pessimism is also present. It was this kind of experience which at least forced Tacitus to spurn gross flattery, to reject propaganda, brought him to express faults, and to differentiate men according to ethical standards which stand open to scrutiny.

Tacitus repeatedly intercepted all attempts to lapse into false security. "Do you think that Nero was the last tyrant? That same belief was held by those who survived Tiberius and Gaius; yet meantime Nero arose more implacable and more cruel." The Senate was weaker than

it was even after Nero's reign when that Emperor's retainers and clients were apprehended and punished. There was little hope for justice even after a ruler fell. "The fairest day after a bad emperor is the first."[23] A streak of pessimism is not the proof of a mind grovelling only after treachery and corruption, rooting out the putrid aspects of political life; rather it is the spirit, arrived at through experience, which prevents the artist from being a dupe to corrupt practices and hyprocrisy. Tacitus' pessimism arises often in the discussions of his critics. It is one of the customary grounds for disqualifying him as an objective historian. Yet Boissier claims that "Tacitus owed to it one of his greatest qualities, that keen insight which prevented his allowing himself to be impressed by appearances, and showed things as they were."[24]

Tacitus was nostalgic for better times, loathed servility, intrigue, dissimulation, yet did not ignore them because they were unattractive to him. Rather he reduced them to order through the power of history. There is no romance, no escape, no wish-fulfillment in the world he presented. There is a certain commendable courage in refusing to lie about or whitewash the ominous or to succumb to patriotic fervor. It is the task of the historian to bring an artist's sense of theme to the raw materials of history in order to elucidate its moral, political and social significance. Tacitus was, perhaps, motivated by an inability to keep silent on subjects which cried out for a hearing, but he also established the criteria of a responsible historiography. The Annals are a remarkable composite of these two intellectual activities.

## III

For Tacitus there is no sense in which historical writing is a substitute for politics. For the Romans, history was an extension of

politics. It was the exercising of a precious liberty. Political morality may be set forth in the examples of those men who gave commendable service to the state, men such as Marcus Lepidus who was a tactful defender of the Senate. It had been impossible to write in such a manner for over a hundred years preceding the death of Domitian. Tacitus endured until that time. According to R. H. Martin, "the Augustan Principate brought a swift end to historical talent. Truth was an immediate casualty, at first through indifference, soon because of flattery or hatred."[25] Tacitus intended to illustrate the manner of proper history by avoiding both servility and hatred. Such history was rare. Tacitus' work was the first in a century. Even under Nerva, Hadrian, Trajan it was not possible to touch upon events close to the present. Thus, by dealing with the reigns of Tiberius and Nero, by examining the transactions of government closely under the cloak of history, he could reveal the dangers which accrued to autocracy by its very nature. Jonson understood this relationship between the historian and a corrupt political state. He had Sejanus describe Cordus' activities in just such terms: the man forced to write of present policy and tricks of state under the disguise of writing of the past. Cordus wrote of republican heroes and the old liberty (II. 303-12).

He was a prototypical humanist. His concern with the past was largely a matter of instructing princes in the pitfalls of rule. The historian's self defense was in making overt denials of any such intents. Tyranny necessitated the uses of history (and subsequently of drama) as a counter-rhetoric, a last disguised voice in times of dwindling freedoms. To the extent that Sejanus is intended to serve a similar function for its own times, Cordus' defense of history increases in importance. History is one of the only reliable means

for defending freedoms under adverse political regimes. Jonson is undoubtedly mindful of the relationship between the artist, the rhetoric of art and the political society at large. Cordus' defense is to that extent a defense of Jonson's own play. Cordus never denied that history had contemporary implications. He merely argued that a ruler pronounces his own guilt in silencing the writer (III. 436-41). History does not create rebellions; it merely records them (III. 449-55). The historian feigns innocence while the record does its work. Nevertheless, Cordus, like Lepidus, played upon Tiberius' desire to be the picture of the perfect monarch. He used his craft to demonstrate the relations between past rulers and their critics (III. 414-40). He never worked directly, but always through the medium of his art. He avoided the passions of Silius. He then effectively turned all of Tiberius' arguments back upon him, worked upon the letter of Tiberius' statements and so used law, psychology and rhetoric of a respectable kind (for his cause was liberty) to ward off his prosecutors (III. 408-10). He was a scholar who, like Tacitus and Jonson, extended his criticism through art and tempered his ways to fit the times. The dramatist -historian became the new social critic. Silius was a hero existing in a non-heroic age; he was allowed to choose his own means of death but that was all. Cordus defied fate both through his writing of history and his defense of it, adjusting meanwhile to an age of absolutism. Cordus was a kind of spokesman for the new historiographical methods more nearly suffient for a period of power politics.

History with such aims was no retreat from politics; it was one of the only means of preserving freedom of speech and opinion (See Appendix C). Even in the Republic during Cicero's time, oratory was under a certain amount of pressure. Where one form of oratory was suppressed, another had to take its place. History was one of the

possible replacements. Cicero conceded this point: "And as History, which bears witness to the passing of the ages, sheds light upon reality, gives life to recollection and guidance to human existence and brings tidings of ancient days, whose voice, but the orator's, can entrust her to immortality?"[26] Cicero showed a high regard for history. There was a close connection between the development of constitutional government and the uses of history. It was a discipline amenable to the Roman mind - far more so than philosophy. The Romans were a practical people. Tacitus was a political thinker, yet "none better proved than he that the Roman constitution was no product of political metaphysics, springing at a single flight from the conceptions of a sage, like that of several Greek cities, but that it was the work of time and of men; that it slowly and spontaneously assumed its form by the strife of antagonistic forces, which, unable to destroy one another, came to mutual terms; and that history consequently is indispensable to understand when and how the diverse elements of which the constitution was composed entered into the whole and the plan they filled therein."[27] History tells what the constitution is by accounting for its origins. Likewise, by tracing the process of its making in human terms, history accounts for the contradictions. Tyranny is not only the product of systems but of men who define and abuse the systems. Out of the accidents of unhappy compromises in Rome came the circumstances under which men of certain noble ideals suffered in the cause of redressing imbalances of powers in that government which yet sought to remain stable and uncriticised. Here is a new responsibility for the historian. He is not only the guardian of records and past reputations, he is physician to constitutional liberties. The statement is introduced here to explain Tacitus' concept of the purposes of

history. But it will be my intention in a later chapter, to review Sejanus in the light of constitutional principles, the point being that in so far as Jonson employs the drama as a means of explaining, in causal terms, the origins and effects of constitutional forces he shares with Tacitus a similar philosophy of historiography.

## IV

Sallust was, perhaps, the most influential historian upon Tacitus. His themes were the corruption of the nobility and the dangers of the novus homo. He preferred virtus based on achievement rather than birth. R. H. Martin claims, however, that his themes were not fully developed, that the politics of a revolutionary age sometimes baffled his genius. His characters were too easily labelled according to preset patterns; he was unable to bring full dramatic concentration to his material.[28] Causal structuring is not so evident in Sallust as it is in Tacitus. Sallust did not perfect the synthesis between literary measures and political themes.

Livy was even less astute at pointing toward the present through the past. He was virtually unwilling to look at the present; history became, partially, an escape. Political intrigue and policy were not a part of his analytic scope. He believed in heroes and the majestic. The ideal Roman character created all too rigid and oversimplified a view of virtues and vices.[29] Livy was not able to move from morality and heroism to the assessment of political intrigue and contemporary government. The historian who is both a moralist and a student of realpolitik must continally deal with this dichotomy of values. Livy was too consistently nostalgic. Tacitus has a unique strength because he is not.

Tacitus' historical style bears the same relationship to its predecessors as Sejanus does to earlier historical plays. Here, this statement must stand as a kind of thesis with the proofs to follow. The drama concerned with the warrior hero, strong moral biases, a contest divided clearly between forces of good and evil is redolent of Livy's kind of historical purposes. But in Sejanus, Jonson is analytical even of the most bizarre political practices. Sejanus is related to the development of the political drama in the same way that Tacitus was to the Roman historiographical tradition. In fact, it was Tacitus' methods, rediscovered in the sixteenth century, which gave rise to this revolutionary reconceptualization of historical writing employed by Jonson. At the center of the Tacitean approach was a moral conflict over degrees of loyalty under corrupt circumstances. It was a dilemma rooted in a constitutional problem which Tacitus, describing it historically, established as a crisis relevant to all constitutional and semi-constitutional forms of government. It was the insolubility of the problem which influenced the mood, style and contents of his writings. Historical writing matured to keep up with the conditions in an advanced state, characterized by skepticism, tempered by an awareness of the need to support the commonweal.

Senatorial history was a long account of factional struggles. These struggles doomed the republic as the English barons doomed their own cause in the fifteenth century. Thus, where one man seized control, history turned to scrutinize that man whose duty was to preserve peace between the warring parties. If he was successful there was usually a price. Flattery or hatred was almost inevitable. Historians generally developed one attitude or the other. A position between was almost impossible to achieve. It meant logical contradictions, since loyalty to that which was basically imperfect

was logically awkward. Yet in Roman politics, it was the only reasonable position. Such an historian must indict both the angry and the servile, perpetuate neither treasons nor tyranny. The delicate balance upon which the constitution was based had to be reflected in the balance which responsible history maintained.

History should no longer be designated to sing the glories and triumphs of great men. It is too perilously close to flattery. Tacitus knew that adulation was the vice of the Flavian historians. Despotism was the greater danger, its exposure, the historian's responsibility. It was not a light and diverting business. Tacitus warned his readers of so much. Without such history the people would remain enslaved by the political skills practised against them beyond their comprehension. Not even the Acta Senatus could be trusted. Even here eulogies and reports of false conspiracies were trumped up to please emperors. There was also eloquence - suspect because it was used to misshape information. Eloquence, if it could not advance the truth, had to be replaced by the truth. Decadence in style was part of the fault; Tacitus labored toward a new style characterized by accuracy and point. Political intimidations led to curruption of style. Tacitus' history became a reaction against both.

Style governs the validity of the message. If there is bitterness it must arise from the implications of the events literally related. There are times when high seriousness and even horror may be created through objectivity in situations where the facts are autotelic.[30] History, falsified or true with a vengeance, loses the cogency and authority gained by the moderate style. "Tacitus set himself, over many years, to perfecting the style most suitable for historical narrative."[31] He returned to the earlier historians for truth of language, verisimilitude, rhetoric of the forum as opposed to rhetoric of the

manuals. His greatest preference was for Sallust. For honesty and manliness of language the republican historians were useful sources. For the same reasons Quintilian looked to that period for a rejuvenation of style.[32] The constitution was no basis for argument. It was too vague, unspecified and controversial. Arguments from the old Roman virtues and the tradition were reasonably subjective. Ethics become, in such times, almost a personal matter. If the style reveals too much scorn, hidden grudges are suspected. Too much praise indicates covert partialities. Even application to the gods or appeals to metaphysics are rhetorical devices. When political circumstances are under close scrutiny, the possibilities of style are narrowed considerably. The foundation of Tacitus' style was half determined by the nature of the subject he had chosen to treat. It required accuracy and an appeal to reason both directly and by the logic of the events themselves; gravitas was the prevailing quality. Other tempers compromise the authority of the political historian. There is a principle of composition involved which, because Jonson treated the same materials, affected the disposition of the parts within the play and Jonson's own style as a tragedian. The issues involved were of a highly important, serious nature. In order to offer them cogently, Jonson had to seek a form and style which would avoid anger and torpor, flattery and libel, which would be direct, accurate, grave. In explaining the causes for the Tacitean style, a rationale is served which accrues perfectly to Jonson.

## V

It has been disproven that Tacitus relied upon one single source for his Annals (Nissen's law). The proof is in the references which have been traced to a variety of older materials. Boissier thinks that

Tacitus was no copier of one work because the Romans were readers and compilers by nature, thorough, systematic collectors of information.[33] Nor was history a matter of adding form and eloquence to a collection of facts. It was a matter of weighing and of discovering the suppressed. "I realize that many writers omit numerous trials and condemnations, bored by repetitions or afraid that catalogues they themselves have found over-long and dismal may equally depress their readers. But numerous unrecorded incidents, which have come to my attention, ought to be known." (Annals, VI. 7; Grant, p. 203). This is one of the salient features of the Taciteen style, demanded by the nature of events themselves. Yet such repetitive lists are never a matter of mere statement only. A host of trials concerned with political crimes raises questions, characterizes a political period, demonstrates the legitimacy of legal practices out of which a whole milieu of problems and considerations may arise. Sheer repetitiveness, factually incontestable, still has a sure rhetorical power. This is one example of the style adjusted to the content, determined by and determining the flow of events.

Cicero is concerned because the systems of rhetoric contain no rules of style for history. He comes to the subject in De Oratore. Cicero believes that the orator has a marked responsibility to the writing of history. Before all comes history's first law. Is it not "that an author must not dare to tell anything but the truth? And its second that he must make bold to tell the whole truth? That there must be no suggestion of partiality anywhere in his writings? Nor of malice? This groundwork of course is familiar to every one;"[34] After this, however, come considerations of structure and diction. Oratory and history need not be contradictions in terms so long as it is recognized that history demands a special kind of oratory. There

must be chronological arrangement and the causal explanations of each major event must be shown. Moreover, there should be some intimation of those plans and actions which the writer approves. To account for what was said and done, descriptions of the manners and circumstances of these actions should be added. For all consequences, contributory causes, whether from accident, discretion or fool-hardiness, should be supplied.[35] Sketches of the lives of outstanding and dignified characters are in order. The language of history, according to Cicero, should be easy, flowing, neither rough nor stinging. In these few sentences he provides a guide which arranges for both truth and the presence of reasonable interpretation. The skills of the orator are adaptable according to the aims of history. The historian must not merely cite his facts, he must establish them and provide them with the ring of authority. The rhetoric of the rostrum and of history differ in these ways but they pertain to the same discipline.[36] Style must be accommodated to the relating of fact with powers of interpretation which do not obscure events. Style must not force facts into new formulations, contort their implicit implications, twist them into the logic of some prescribed syntactical pattern or some dominating metaphor.

Walker assesses the influences of rhetoric in Tacitus' history in some detail. The skills of the orator are clearly in evidence: the sequentially organized passages, the calculated delays and the climactic arrangements of episodes. The dramatist and rhetorican are both at work in the creation of the trial scenes. There is a constant quality of persuasiveness in his history.[37] Tacitus knows how to display pathos and horror; oratorial devices are present to express his intent. But there is no reason to doubt his sincerity. His finest effects are the expression of human suffering, desolation after calamity, atmospheres of

secrecy and fear, indignant protestations of fraud. Such were his times, such must be his themes. Tacitus is replete with metaphors but they are local, centered on verbs which often carry implications of strength, explosion, strain, assault, violence. The broader metaphors of political order, ships of state, beehives, analogies with the human body are absent. History is the work of an orator, but it has laws of its own. To come to terms with history as a special kind of oratory is a way of considering what Tacitus understood the historians' calling to be. Oratory aids in the establishment of fact. It is also the means of establishing the tragic connotations of events. From history comes genre through the mediator of the historian's rhetoric.

## VI

Tacitus is concerned with power and its uses. Power is the factor which moves states and factions. It is the statesman's challenge to gain, hold and control it. Tiberius was one of the first great masters of policy, a foundation figure in the study of political power. Leaders of secular states in the Renaissance were instructed largely by his example. They attempted to replace fortune and accident with a science of politics. The medievals believed it was inevitable that unnatural rulers would fall. The Italian skeptics were not so certain, or that it was even desirable. Policy is the art which enables princes to maintain control over all lesser factions in the realm. But power also leads to corruption while the evil and illegal may also imitate its devices.

There is a choice and selection of materials which stamps the world of Tacitus' histories with a quality distinctly Taciteen. His primary subject is the political life of the capital, but there are

many sub-themes which assert themselves by dint of the repetitions of incidents and character descriptions required to complete the record: the long list of trials, of informers, petty clients, the incessant political bargaining and covert dealing. The impression is of a whispering city where ambition motivates everyone, where words never mean what they seem, where the management of power is the first law of political life, where the cunning play for high stakes and the weak perish. It is a distinct atmosphere yet it is history and created with the integrity of history. It is not only the subject matter but this sense of the political life of Rome which, I would contend, Jonson desired to recreate in the play. The only proof is the care with which Jonson constructed his Roman Kulturbild and the similarity of effect it has upon the reader. Jonson had to find the pattern of drama required to provide the impression of a world of political intrigue, spying, deceptive rhetoric, covert ploys for power, and he desired to recreate such a world historically so that it could not be mistaken for a theatrical extravaganza. Here is an essential aspect of the influence the Roman had upon Jonson.

More congenial spirits have resisted the idea that men can be so patently calculating; it is related to the problem of credibility which Sejanus raises. Tacitus predicted the criticism. It was his duty to find the hidden political motivations which accounted for historical fact. Ultimately he was pressed to see hypocrisy as the only explanation for almost every political deed. Tacitus' assessment of the men in government offices may seem boring, but it has its uses. This is the real world of politics. He knew that readers had their favourite topics, "geographical description, the changing fortune of a battle, the glorious death of a commander." (Annals, IV, 33; Grant,

p. 173), but they are not germane to modern political history. "My themes on the other hand concern cruel orders, unremitting accusations, treacherous friendships, innocent men ruined - a conspicuously monotonous glut of downfalls and their monotonous causes." (Annals IV, 33; Grant, p. 173). His themes are indeed more distasteful, less diverting, but the more necessary for explaining the nature of the political life. History is otherwise, an escape into adventure, exciting changes of fortune, travelogue, dramatic scenes laden with emotional intensity. Polybius is instructive on this point. "For since there are two objects, improvement and pleasure, which those who wish to study any subject either by the use of their ears or of their eyes, should keep before them, and since this is especially true of the study of history, a too generous treatment of sensational events contributes to neither. For not only do abnormal reversals of fortune arouse no emulation, but no one has any permanent pleasure in seeing or reading of things which are contary to nature and contrary to the general sentiment of mankind."[38] It may well be true that people are amused by abnormal reversals of fortune for a few pleasureful moments because they are contrary to nature and prove possible that which was thought to be impossible, but they cannot be a continuing source of pleasure or instruction. This could be virtually a credo for both Tacitus and Jonson, the former willing to dwell on the monotonous but all important politics of the Senate, the latter to eschew stage gimmicks and theatrical extravaganzas in order to make a play which would be politically useful to men.

Tacitus emphasizes the sense of sameness in the events he narrated and the perpetual treachery and evil which he saw in all aspects of politics. It could not be told otherwise. Tacitus' history could barely escape the appearance of bitter satire. His assessment of

motives was warranted by the facts, yet the implications of that record are so open and clear that no reader can reasonably ignore them.

Tacitus was a moralist as well as an artist. Undoubtedly his judgement was set in motion by a set of values he considered the eternal verities of right human conduct. He employed the techniques of the artist in clarifying his apprehensions. Tacitus knew how to employ irony, not the witty asides or verbal quips of the satirist, but the irony in political circumstances and groupings of characters which thrust themes into view. He knew how to stagger scenes, hold back information and release it at critical moments. He could develop sudden conflicts, build climactic sequences intensifying the sense of evil or the ominous. Walker claims that Tacitus was a "master of all the devices which had been used in Greek tragedy, so far as these can be used in the medium of prose - the dramatic monologue, swift development of a conflict, the heightening of tension towards the end of an 'act', sudden surprise and reversals of fortune, hints of foreboding by supernatural and other means."[39] Tacitus used dramatic irony through juxtaposing events and characters. He created full portraits of his characters before they entered, analyzing motive forces and temperament. He worked as an artist to achieve the kind of order which emphasized through repetition, shocked by delay, illuminated by irony, and fixed the particular as pertaining to the general modes of human behaviour.

## VII

My intention in setting out the career and writings of the Roman historian is to establish the salient features of the Tacitean phenomenon which relate to Jonson's <u>Sejanus</u>. The question of direct influence is not an essential one. Jonson could have learned a great deal from

Tacitus on how to solve the problems of writing political history. It is equally valid to argue that in having chosen to create a political history based on Tacitus' materials, Jonson was forced to find answers to the problems of theme and style involved in setting that material out in a dramatic form and that many of Jonson's solutions are like Tacitus' own. I do not think, as A. H. Bullen does, that Tacitus' genius and power deprive Jonson of all originality and independence. It is as much in the nature of the subject itself that the story must be told so, as it is a matter of copying Tacitus' ruthless account of political barbarism. For Bullen it is really a matter of credibility. The "hideousness" of Tacitus' subject is too overpowering for an Elizabethan dramatist to develop.[40] But if there is truth in Tacitus then his views rediscovered by Jonson are equally capable of revealing truth.

That the Tacitean world picture may not be superimposed upon the Elizabethan one is another problem. Jonson's indictment of treachery may be an overstatement for his age if a kind of direct "application" is urged. This is not necessarily Jonson's intention. Principles and patterns are more important, the constant principles of power and its abuses which pertain to all political societies. Jonson's play, summarized, indicates how consistently he deals with political matters primarily in their public aspects. If the play is faulted for boredom, the fact that Jonson, too, was required to build his impression of the political world out of repeated instances of spying, deceptive speech-making, treason trials, the ploys of political ambition, a society without respite from treachery and duplicity as described in the first chapter, must be taken into consideration. This is only one instance revealing that the principles of organization and selection employed by Tacitus are like those Jonson found necessary to duplicate the political life of Rome in his play.

Jonson's concept of history will be greatly enlarged upon in a subsequent chapter, but the Tacitean historiography and the Roman sense of the purpose of history already set out can be useful in explaining Jonson's attitudes toward the materials of the play. History must be carefully controlled especially when it is concerned with such matters as monarchy, rebellion and treason if it is to avoid flattery or assault. Therefore truth, above all, must be the major preoccupation of the historian, both to fact and argument. Cicero made that the first law of history. History had proper methods which separated it from chronicling on one side and harangue on the other. Yet the historian is an interpreter, his version of events ever in judgement of, and judged by the facts. The historian's conceptualization of his materials is the basis for his understanding of the order and principles which inform them. History is invariably an act of judgement, a judgement which is essential if man is to know anything of cause and context. Inherent in this statement and general approach is that the play, even its literary aspects, is to be assessed in the terms of history.

Sejanus is a play full of oratory based upon those literary skills which represent Jonson's understanding of the rhetoric appropriate to history. There is a gravity in Tacitus which Jonson imitates in Sejanus, a specification which he referred to in "To the Readers" as "gravity and height of elocution" (lines 16-17). The style appropriate to the serious political historian belongs also to the tragedian. There is the risk of trying the patience of an audience with incessant high seriousness but the movement of events in the play is dictated by the accretion of sober historical events set forth through accuracy of imitation, and rhetorical verisimilitude. Such

history, as history, must break from the old categories of laudatory biography, moral portrait, the detailed annalistic account and records of military exploit. In such a way, from Tacitean history, Jonson makes his way toward a reformation of the English historical tragedy.

There is a particular kind of political gravity in such a speech as Tiberius' clarification of the proceedings against Silius in the Senate. Varro, the consul, brought charges against Silius, who in turn tried the court on a matter of law to see if a fair trial was intended. Since Varro was both prosecutor and one of the judges the proceedings were illegal. Tiberius served as the final adjudicator on legal matters, a dubious principle in itself. His reply, mundane in appearance, is yet a model of the semi-oblique verbiage of not quite straightforward legal practices.

> It hath been usual
> And is a right that custom hath allowed
> The magistrate, to call forth private men,
> And to appoint their day; which privilege
> We may not in the consul see infringed,
> By whose deep watches and industrious care
> It is so labored, as the commonwealth
> Receive no loss by any oblique course. (III. 201-8)

Tiberius never speaks in his own person. The commonwealth or the law or even the "privilege" of the consul are various extended frames of reference. Through self-depersonalization Tiberius gains an authority to pronounce which Silius can scarcely counteract. His reply, "Caesar, thy fraud is worse than violence," (III. 209) lacks that authority, that gravity of additional reference. Tiberius does no more than state a principle of law established by custom which was binding under the present circumstances, followed by a three line afterthought - namely that Varro was a loyal guardian of the commonweal, a man not given to corrupt practices. Tiberius displays no more authority than he should as ultimate referee, yet we know it is fraud, that his defense of Varro is proof that Silius is foredoomed. The syntactical connection

"which priviledge" makes a sudden sure link between principle and practice that entertains no qualifications or alternatives. As character after character appears, each one identifying with some greater cause upon which his politic rhetoric is based, the play seeks its own natural level of gravity. It is not a tragic style constructed out of a language of literary grandeur. Jonson imitates throughout, the language of political negotiation, the language of Roman politicians in daily affairs as recorded by Tacitus.

Gravity is also communicated by the seriousness of the issues involved. In Tacitean manner, Jonson finds opportunities to rehearse the names of Sejanus' victims with an effect which parallels Tacitus' "monotonous glut of downfalls", his long lists of political treacheries and their causes. Tiberius and Sejanus discuss them, one at a time, in formulating their plan of attack (II. 285-305). Agrippina counts the victims over as evidence that the Germanican cause is totally lost (IV. 18-24). But Jonson's finest invention is Sejanus' own vaunting, incredulous that the fates could abandon him before his project was complete.

> I, that did help
> To fell the lofty cedar of the world,
> Germanicus; that at one stroke cut down
> Drusus, that upright elm; withered his vine;
> Laid Silius and Sabinus, two strong oaks,
> Flat on the earth; besides those other shrubs,
> Cordus, and Sosia, Claudia Pulchra,
> Furnius, and Gallus, which I have grubbed up;
> And since, have set my axe so strong and deep
> Into the root of spreading Agrippine;
> Lopped off and scattered her proud branches - Nero,
> Drusus, and Caius too, although replanted - (V. 241-52).

The extended metaphor may have come a little too readily to Jonson; it is uncharacteristic for the play. But it carries Sejanus through the long list of victims, establishing by analogy the relative

importance of each. Jonson manages, even here, to re-emphasize the irony since in the descriptions of the trees he imparts a sense of their moral qualities: "lofty" Germanicus, "upright" Drusus, "strong" Silius and Sabinus. (In designing the verse Jonson causes the names to stand out at the beginnings and ends of lines.) Tacitus' relentless compiling of atrocities Jonson introduces into the play. In act four (323-44) he races through the final actions taken against the Germanicans. The speed has its effect. Laco appears, hastening Nero to prison. He announces that Drusus is already a prisoner in the palace and Agrippina confined to Pandataria. "Confined? Imprisoned? Banished?/Most tripartite! The cause, sir?/(Laco.) Treason." (IV. 341-42). Jonson continues to build his tragic style in the manner in which Tacitus achieved dramatic and thematic effects in the Annals. Gravity is inherent in the unmixed, undiluted presentation of political affairs.

Through design, there is an establishing of issues which raises history from fact to a form of "statement" and thus a form of thought. The rise and fall of Sejanus is not only a complete action, but it is a sufficient action through which the variables of the professional politician may be exposed to critical view. Plotting and pacing, the choice of episodes for dramatization, depends not only upon the necessity of concluding an event, but upon completing a political essay as well. Jonson seldom duplicates; the argument as well as the action is ever advancing. The play moves from ambition and greed (Sejanus' flatterers), to moral decadence (the Senate), to lust (Livia), and policy (Tiberius), yet subtly, always juxtaposing private nature with political conditions and idealogical flaws, dramatizing the rhetoric by which men are deceived, manipulated or informed. On man the political being, the argument is almost comprehensive. The trials of

Silius and Cordus appear in the third act. They seem to be events related only obliquely to the main story of Tiberius and Sejanus. Yet they are accorded the prominence of a climactic moment in the play. In these scenes tyranny, principled republicanism and moral indignation come into direct confrontation with one another. The manipulation of the law, the bloody use of rhetoric, the servility of the Senate, the place of history in the preservation of political freedoms - these are the themes; none could be more central. The third act is the heart of the "argument" in Sejanus.

In Sejanus characters are both portrayed and revealed. Tiberius is a man yet a study in policy; Sejanus is an individual and a study in ambition and cunning. (The whole problem of characterization which both writers had to settle as historians will be treated later.) Sejanus is a kind of animated portrait. He is no great man but rather a manager, directed by ambition, contained by policy. He is neither cliched nor chilling, neither impassioned nor impulsive until the very end. He simply works, businesslike, as a politician works, according to his own dark ends. He commands among the servile and waits modestly in the court of the great, self-confident but secretive. He knows how to take advantage of opportunity. It is the play's implicit suggestion that Sejanus is an ordinary man with extra-ordinary ambitions, perverse because in his ordi nariness he lacks all human empathy. He is neither a caricature nor a psychological study, neither a villain nor a psychopath, but rather a political portrait in a play about political relationships.

Sejanus manages love in the same calculated way as he manages politics. For him the techniques, with variations, all come to the same thing. Love, itself, is a ploy; "Venus hath the smallest share

in it." (I. 374). The arrangement scene between Sejanus and Livia's physician Eudemus, provides Jonson with an opportunity to luxuriate in the language of medicine and cosmetics, "opiates, juleps, apozems,/ Magistral syrups," (I. 359-60). Familiar satiric themes momentarily appear — cosmetics and quackery — but it is Jonson's intention to show the connections between personal vanity and the more far-reaching corruptions of state. A new conquest for Livia is simultaneously a means whereby the ambitious may advance themselves. The point is hardly lessened by the fact that it is Livia who ultimately is the cause of Sejanus' downfall, indirectly, in that his request to marry her gives the fatal turn to Tiberius' suspicions of him. The simultaneous preparation of Livia's cosmetics and a poison for her husband in Act II is a perfect Jonsonian situation. The juxtaposing of the two creates an unmistakable irony. Cosmetics bear the same relationship to feminine beauty as false rhetoric does to the world of politics. Sejanus, in his relations with Livia, his flatterers and followers, with Tiberius, reveals the extent of his ambitions. What he is as a man suggests the themes central to the play.

Among the "subjects" which emerge in Sejanus are the study of power, the influence of the new man, the idea of constitution, political jargon, the treason laws, the nature of monarchy, fame, stoicism, political ambition, the fall of Rome. Each one can be retraced to The Annals. Sejanus is a study in absolute power and thus the danger of tyranny, as well as a study in the fortunes of the political critic and the fate of the suppressed political opposition. This dual purpose, this divided concern is essential to an understanding of the structure of the play. Moreover, it is a play to be read, not as de Luna has suggested, against the background of the Essex rebellion or any other

contemporary event, but in light of the Tudor constitution.[41]

## VIII

Something more must be said about the Tacitean nostalgia which appears in the play in the form of a ritual memory of past heroes. Such nostalgia is a concept easily mistaken, a fact which makes it seem the more to Jonson's credit as an historian that he got it right in terms of its relative importance to the other political and moral impulses of his characters. Under Domitian, Tacitus became the foe of the imperial system which had weakened the Senate; as the influence of that organization dwindled, the nostalgic memories of past periods of senatorial history began to fix themselves in the minds of the old senatorial class, to be in turn adopted by the newer class of young politicians who resented the tyrannous powers of the monarch.[42]

The idealization of the past became almost poetic, an "idée fixe which presented the era of the republic as an age of sound and disinterested government by a dignified, honest and able senate. That the picture was largely a figment of the imagination made it no less potent, and there was undeniable reality in the princeps who could throttle all but the most rash of the senators for fifteen years."[43] This issue pervades the Annals and keeps alive the theme of political decay. The Senate was the victim of an imperial usurpation of power. Tiberius strengthened his power while that body of government counsellors was humiliated and silenced. The grievances of the oppressed were uttered in the form of a memory of better times. It was an activity which was both a form of historical writing and a form of moral lament. Decline from an age of heroes became settled in the Roman mind, an idea related to stoic resistance and withdrawal.

Jonson judges the relative importance of this nostalgia and incorporates it proportionately into the play. Arruntius proclaims that men have changed, have become more base. Moral decadence goes before political corruption. Sabinus and Silius join in to recite the names of the truly great Roman heroes: Germanicus, Cato, Brutus, Julius Caesar. The overtones of this conversation (I. 86-159), are multiple but they do not include sentimentality. If promotion of the national stability and commonweal is the greatest good, then a reverential memory of those forebears whose virtues and intelligence made Rome a great power, is a form of religion, of patriotism, moral indoctrination, personal inspiration as well as a form of moral censure. The record of Brutus' life may inspire men, "'Tis we are base,/Poor, and degenerate from th'exalted strain/Of our great fathers." (I. 87-89), and stand as a condemnation of tyranny (I. 93-96).

Cordus engages in this moral nostalgia as an historian. Satrius accuses him of biting the present age by writing of past leaders as Rome's last heroes (III. 379-92). Cordus pleads the right of the historian: "Posterity pays every man his honor" (III. 456). Brutus and Cassius remembered, poses a threat only to men who fear a fate similar to Julius Caesar's. The predominant portrait in the play is Germanicus'. He was the paragon of old Roman virtues. In his life account the rise of Tiberian tyranny is summarized. Jonson divided Tacitus' opinions of him among the several characters in the play vying to praise him as he deserved (I. 136-59). Germanicus' popularity among the Romans was a testimony to the quality of his life. He showed the traits desirable in a ruler. He was not only a skil ful general but a just administrator in peace, loved by his subjects. He had dignity without arrogance, kindness and modesty. Germanicus was a

family man (Annals II. 71; Grant, p. 113). For his near perfection he might well expect to arouse Tiberius' jealousy. Alive he was a slander to Tiberius who also sought fame; once dead, Germanicus' loyal followers continued to plague the Emperor by their devotion to his memory. Germanicus was an embodiment of a style of political integrity.

> He was a man most like to virtue, 'in all
> And every action, nearer to the gods
> Than men in nature, of a body' as fair
> As was his mind, and no less reverend
> In face than fame. He could so use his state,
> Temp'ring his greatness with his gravity,
> As it avoided all self-love in him,
> And spite in others. (I. 124-31).

There is in the tone of the speech an enthusiasm fused with facts. A rhetorical poise "temp'ring his greatness with his gravity," is the result of a rehearsed nurturing. The portrait is received wisdom characterized, the vehicle in a figure denoting an attitude of right life style. From Tacitean nostalgia and Roman hero-worship Jonson creates a sense of the moral tradition and supplies his play with a framework of values both Roman and universal. The Germanican portrait in the first act Jonson uses to establish a fixed moral vantage point which inspires stoic endurance and judges the ensuing treacheries.

The idea of republicanism had come to mean little more than a moral frame of reference. Syme says outright that "Republicanism was moral, not political." To pledge one's allegiance to the republican ideals did not indicate automatic hostility toward the Caesars.[44] It was, rather, a kind of "cult" designed to preserve old mores and traditions; the idea of the republic was without constitutional value. Yet it was easy for nostalgic republicans to be labelled and eliminated as rebels. They became victims to the ambiguities of use to which the old traditions could be placed. Sejanus labored to make their observations appear like the doctrines of an active civil war (II. 369-72).

It was more than the potential political values of republicanism which aroused Tiberius' ire, the real Roman religion was in the idealization of its heroes. Every man who rose to highest political distinction also sought a position among the gods. Religion itself, ironically, became a cause for ambition. The attainment of true power and respect meant immortality. Sejanus had statues erected in his honor all over the city. It was the Senate which was the essential canonizing body. They, at one time, had sole power to propose and approve the awarding of honors. Thus, for the guardians of Rome's religious heritage, it became a matter of principle that religious dignity be accorded only to those who had qualities of magnanimity, courage, honesty, prudence, justice. The senators attempted to impede the desecration of religious standards by the addition of unworthy names to the roll of Roman heroes. The Senate betrayed itself and its heritage when it flattered corrupt politicians. Thus, Tiberius both hated yet courted the Senate.

Jonson translates one of Tiberius' speeches from the Annals (IV. 37-38; Grant pp. 175-176) into the play (I. 439-502), in which he refused to allow more temples to be built in his honor than Augustus. Rather he desired, as he claimed, only to be remembered in men's hearts for the good deeds he had done. His reward for virtue would be a peaceful life and a good reputation after death. Tacitus comments that some thought him "modest" others "uneasy" and that still others attributed it to his "degeneracy". There is a heavy suggestion of ulterior motives in this display of self-effacement. Tiberius was really a beggar for fame. Everything else rulers want they "receive instantly". "One thing only needs to be untiringly worked for - a fair name for the future." (Annals, IV. 38; Grant, p. 176). The

substance of this reflection upon Tiberius by Tacitus Jonson adds to Tiberius' own speech thereby making the statement a masterpiece of duplicity. It is a veritable solicitation for religious reverence. When a man has all power, there is little else to seek. This separates kings from lower men.

> The rest of greatness princes may command,
> And therefore neglect. Only a long,
> A lasting, high, and happy memory
> They should, without being satisfied, pursue.
> Contempt of fame begets contempt of virtue. (I. 498-503)

It is Tiberius' nature, as a rhetorician, to reach the dregs of hypocrisy when he reaches the height of sentence. A good reputation remained beyond his grasp. His jealousy and his quest for immortality made him angry and resentful. Tiberius was not altogether a Machiavel without personal cause. These were his reasons for crushing those whose lives were a slander to his reputation, especially those who lived in memory of Germanicus. The policies Machiavelli would have admired in the service of state were simultaneously turned against those who frustrated his spiritual quest. He chose a raft of clients in choosing one who would teach the words of praise due to an emperor to others by example and who would eradicate, as individual delators bearing all the risks and odium, Tiberius' own personal enemies. Jonson penetrated and dramatized this relationship between private will and political events. The irony, intimated in Tacitus, is further heightened in the play as dupes and stooges shout out their flatteries:

> Rare!
>
> Satrius. Most divine!
>
> Sejanus. The oracles are ceased,
> That only Caesar, with their tongue, might speak.
>
> Arruntius. Let me be gone; most felt and open this!
>
> (I. 503-505)

Those who refused to flatter were in danger of prosecution (V. 463). Arruntius was one of the few who dared to refuse Tiberius the

obeisance he expected.

In contrast to Tiberius there emerges a kind of Tacitean hero, that sort of man who for his integrity and conscience Jonson could also admire, a key to certain of his characterizations in the play. "Tacitus clearly prefers the line followed by Gaius Cassius, a man to be reckoned with as a good jurist and as the descendent of the Tyrannicide. In him lives the severitas of the old Republic - for he was a strict disciplinarian in the field, harsh to slaves and freedmen, overbearing to the allies. Against this he was unwilling to join in flattery to the Emperor, loyal to his family traditions, and prepared if need be to die for his beliefs."[45] Here is one type of Tacitean hero. There were others who managed to live out their lives with quietness in the service of the government. Such was Agricola, Tacitus' father-in-law. This man was commendable for his moderation. He was a man of sensible proportions seeking a mean between political protest and apathy. He served without ostentation, careful to avoid wrath or jealousy, willing to live as necessity compelled, thankful for good princes, willing to endure the bad. A passage from the Annals will serve to illustrate that the age of heroism was over, but that worthy courses were still marginally possible.

> "I find that this Marcus Lepidus played a wise and noble part in events. He often palliated the brutalities caused by other people's sycophancy. And he had a sense of proportion - for he enjoyed unbroken influence and favour with Tiberius. This compels one to doubt whether, like other things, the friendships and enmities of rulers depend on destiny and the luck of man's birth. Instead, may not our personalities play some part, enabling us to steer a way, safe from intrigues and hazards, between perilous insubordination and degrading servility?" (Annals IV. 20; Grant, 167).

Jonson follows this pattern as far as he is able. The old Republican virtues fuse with his own sense of moral probity and the satirist's comparisons are in evidence throughout. Tacitus, in such a figure as

Lepidus, goes back on his own tragic theme suggesting a mid-ground between enslavement and destruction. It is necessary for him as an historian to present examples of men who had negotiated with emperors and had given worthy service to the state. There is in this some indication that Tacitus thought such a character as Silius too rash, that he had thrown his life away precipitiously on a bootless cause of state. At this point Jonson departs from Tacitus, somewhat, in order to place his own emphasis upon the tragic aspects of the material. The play presents a plot which is locked at every turn, a plot of political entrapment. Lepidus' middle way is given a hearing, but that course does not discredit the course followed by Arruntius whose spleen is greater than his willpower to maintain silence. His is a noble "fault". Moreover, Jonson suppresses all record of Lepidus' friendship to the Emperor. As Barish says, "If there is one thing Jonson will not allow in Sejanus, it is friendship between a good man like Lepidus and a brutal, degenerate tyrant like Tiberius."[46] Jonson raises his tragic plot out of the impossibility of reconciling personal integrity with Tiberian tyranny, integrity as embodied in an Arruntius whose anger, like Agrippina's, becomes his fate. There are active and passive forms of resistance distinguished by Tacitus, forming part of the argument of the Annals, which also pass into the play as part of a debate over right courses in the political life. It is a Tacitean theme, I think, uniquely developed by Jonson in English drama, an issue crucial to the play's tragic order as it is to the political issues (to be discussed in their respective contexts): quietism vs. stoicism and the tragedy of the political victim. For their importance to the debate Arruntius, Silius, Sabinus and Lepidus must be more individually considered than as members of a mere chorus. Their mode of commentary

upon the action is an essential part of that action; they are as important as Sejanus or Tiberius.

The essential point is that Jonson, in following the procedures of the political historian, also discovers a new related dramtic style. The rhetoric of Tacitus' Romans becomes the foundation of Jonson's gravity. Tacitus' grouping and compounding of similar events is paralleled by Jonson in his relentless portrayal of crimes, trials, duplicity in order to gain the same effects. Tacitean themes emerge simultaneously, all of a political-moral nature: the uses and abuses of power and the means for survival under oppression. Jonson employs the objectivity of drama (as history) from which the narrator is removed even while organizing the materials in interpretative sequences in a way similar to Tacitus' own factual yet thematic approach. Jonson, recognizing the issues contained in events themselves, organizes in order to clarify. He sees how waste arises from the clashes between political values — imperial and republican — in a particular context. He records the compound responses of men who are both loyal yet critics. He follows Tacitus in presenting the variety of citizen-heroes who have studied both how to serve yet preserve integrity — the debate between active and passive stoicism. Jonson traces to their sources those aspects of the conflict which arise in the private will, in political necessity and in the constitutional structure itself. The "hero" and the victims are equally portrayed, the former as predator, the latter as commentators and participants reflecting various life styles. Jonson finds in the Tacitean portraits of past leaders a basis for his own moral order in the play. In such ways as these Tacitus' themes and techniques reappear in Sejanus.

Equally significant is the fact that Roman constitutional contradictions are employed in the creation of Jonson's tragic plot.

It is in this area that Jonson's play, as a political statement, broadens the scope of the drama. The tragic and the satiric arise simultaneously, the implications of issues suggesting more pervasive principles extending into larger political actions redolent of the epic.

## IX

The subject of Tacitean history is tyranny rather than treason. In first-century Rome, virtually every act of the emperors was criticised, including the acts of the more benign rulers. "There is no doubt then, that, towards the end, in the aristocractic world of Rome, the habit was inveterate of reviling the government of the prince, whoever he might be and whatever he might do." Already established is the fact that republicanism was a nostalgic myth. It took on heroic qualities only from a cloudy distance; it was "a pious usage among the Romans, a duty almost, to glorify the good old times, and that the Emperors themselves did not fail to do so, though assuredly they had not the slightest intention of returning to them."[47] The office of emperor was a mistake; no ruler could resist its temptations, so expansive were the powers and influences which composed it. Tacitus knew this. "If Tiberius, in spite of all his experience, has been transformed and deranged by absolute power, will Gaius do better?" (Annals, VI. xlviii; Grant, p. 225). It was not chance which made emperors corrupt; it was the very nature of the office. Men were past all possibility of control through training and moral instruction. History reveals what the office of emperor had done to the men who held it. Dudley claims, in support of this awareness, "perhaps, also, Tacitus had come to realize that the central problem of the first century A.D. was not so much the moral characters of individual

emperors as the nature of the principate itself."[48] But the idea of the office of _princeps_ had fixed itself in the minds of the Romans as part of the constitutional structure. It was a necessary office and a necessary evil. There were no safe nor constitutional grounds by which it could be attacked or curbed. Should a bad emperor be toppled, a new one would inevitably come to power in his place and perhaps a worse. After Tiberius came Gaius. The anticipation of a young prince trained by Macro was enough to make the old Arruntius, who had seen the worst of Tiberius, despair of life. He bled himself to death at the very prospect of Gaius' ascent to power (Annals, VI. 47-48; Grant, p. 225). The Senate could not possibly rule an empire in its old cumbersome way. It had already failed, apallingly, to carry out this task. There was no point in speaking of constitutional reform as there was no point in hoping for a man who would not be corrupted by the office. The power struggle had arrived at its natural and inevitable conclusions. Political theorizing could have little practical use. Tacitus does not indicate that it is even a realistic proposal to struggle for the preservation of the dyarchy. One side will assume the greater power and enslave the other. This is the more basic law. For this reason, Tacitus is inclined to present history in such a way that it implies a moral censure of tyranny together with a sense of tragic resignation. In such circumstances the satiric is joined with the tragic sense of life. Dealing with similar circumstances, Jonson comes to a similar complex mood.

There is little indication that Jonson believed in the possibilities of constitutional reform. There are constitutional concepts in the play which deserve further consideration, but as a work of art the deadlock of forces gives rise to the study of men under extreme yet probable and existing political circumstances. Power and corruption are posited as

the ineluctable facts. This makes the situation tragic for good men, but the moral indignation which arises from those same men makes the work a diatribe. The variables of art are drawn upon to make these human responses to the use and abuses of power clear and felt.

The essence of the cogent tragic plot is inevitability. The viewer must be convinced that the catastrophe must happen as it does, that given the personalities and circumstances the resolution is predetermined. Political ambition is one of the given factors. It needs no explanation. The senatorial party was a fact, a body seeking political integrity in a state where the prince was driven to suppress them out of fear and envy. The family of Agrippina had its rights as an aristocratic family. These were the established parties; the rest followed. Each political principle Jonson found in the source. There is little that needed to be altered though Jonson, having perceived the deadlock, enhanced and clarified the factions and heightened the irony and frustration. These political principles became his plot. At the end of the play there is no restoration of order, no reconstruction. Tiberius and his status quo prevail. As history it could not be otherwise. From an intellectual appreciation of this political logic twin responses arise, a sense of outrage and a sense of waste. These are the historical origins of satiric-tragedy, a phenomenon to be discussed as literary genre in the fourth chapter.

X

Tacitus is concerned not only with the individual parties and factions which participated in or took advantage of this political and constitutional chaos, but with the types of men who tenanted these parties and why their characteristic interests led not only to

specific cases of injustice, opportunism, duplicity, but to the breakdown of the whole political fabric. This point is also raised because Jonson follows the typing in the play, mindful of the typicality of roles and their effect upon national histories. The first was the Emperor as a faction, seeking personal ends in his uses of the law, the second the class of new men, the third the old aristocracy. These postures Jonson, through his art, establishes at the center of a representative political state: the tyrannous ruler, the victim, the client-delator and in the final act, the mobs.

"Domitian's dislike of the over-educated, of which Tacitus speaks so bitterly," was an issue which applied equally to Tiberius' reign.[49] Cordus, the historian, defended himself brilliantly, but it did not prevent the attempted destruction of his works. The attack upon the intelligentsia, Rome's conscience, was a measure of the degree of corruption to which Rome had sunk. The Annals is a record of those men who jeopardized their own safety in order to preserve the old Roman heritage. Name after name appears and by the sheer bulk of cases, Tacitus manages to create the impression of an extensive, ruthless and pointless purge. The oppression of the republicans forms a central thematic action in the play. Given the logistics of the Roman government under Tiberius, they were a helpless class. The original pattern was Tacitus', one which Jonson adapts to drama. Both men understood the phenomenon as tragic, but Jonson was concerned with conceptualizing it also as tragedy. This attack upon the vestigial republicans was not only a "local" issue; it was part of the deterioration of the Roman civilization.

Tacitus does not generalize on the novus homo theme. It may not be said that this class of men alone was responsible for the destruction of the Senate by their opportunism. Seneca, Thrasea Paetus and Corbulo, all "new men", were dignified scholars and literary men who became victims of Nero.[50] Tacitus, likewise, was one of the first generation politicians of his period. A complete antithesis between upstarts and the old aristocracy will not hold. Yet the novus homo class was a significant phenomenon in Roman political life. As they entered the Senate, these men were either enticed into the service of the prince by the lure of wealth and power or compelled to support the senatorial cause against the threats of absolutism. It was difficult to remain neutral. An illustration of the choice can be worked out almost in morality play terms. Greed and ambition, together with a lack of tradition, a desperation to rise and a willingness to be unscrupulous, led many young men into the parties of spies and delators who performed services in exchange for booty and positions. They were an extremely dangerous class, for each victory usually signified the reduction of the membership of the senatorial party. The absolute rule of the emperors was simultaneously strengthened. The other alternative was to follow the straight and narrow way which gave support to those who labored against tyranny. A high regard for the past was a prerequisite, a regard which could be derived only through moral uprightness and the study of history.[51] Some joined this established cause and won Tacitus' praise. Even in the Annals there is evidence that a few yet possessed true virtue, thrift, and the old fashioned morality.[52]

That so many "new men", generally, were allowed into the Senate presented a great danger to the Empire because they placed too little

importance in the conservative traditions. It was just such a class of men which the prince could employ to his advantage in squelching the aristocratic opposition, which resulted in the vicious political cycle already described. Therefore, this class and its corruptibility became something of a theme in both Tacitus and Jonson. The latter, especi lly, turns upon the opportunist mentality, exposing in detail the immorality which is causally related to the decline of civil liberties. He relates the careers of upstart politicians— Sejanus, Macro and a host of lesser politicos. Private greed is linked with the debilitation of a state.

A pattern of decline becomes part of the total structure of the Annals. The struggle takes place between classes in the same way that it does between men. Jonson's play, in following the Annals, gives a clear impression of class struggle in the making. The noble families were unable to compete with the "new men" clients who served themselves in the name of the principate. Fear, suicide, a love for leisure caused many of them to drop out of sight. Dudley remarks that "suicide was the occupational hazard of the Roman aristocracy at that time ...."[53] Tacitus is aware of this crisis and concerned that they did not subside into an almost voluntary extinction.[54] The crucial factor, as in the case of the new man coming to power, was the ability to make firm moral choices. Thus, Tacitus had to turn upon the senatorial class for its corruption, decadence and self-indulgence.[55] There had been a standing inclination to develop the "pose and cult of leisure, inducing torpor — and torpor seemed often safety in Rome of the Caesars."[56]

Senatorial dereliction of duty meant that criticism had to go in both directions. Both tyranny and senatorial decadence are described.

The Annals is by no means a struggle between good and evil forces. Ironically, even Tiberius was peeved by this unwillingness on the part of the Senate to fight for survival as a political force. So abject was the Senate that Tiberius was known "leaving the court, to cry, 'Oh race of men./Prepared for servitude!' Which showed that he,/Who least the public liberty could like,/As loathly brooked their flat servility." (I 52-55).[57] The weakness of the senatorial class forced Tiberius to make more appointments from the class of new men, to pay them huge bribes and struggle to keep their loyalties in order to run the government. It was a slow but fatal waxing and waning of powers. The cycle of government was in progress, the result both of moral decadence on one side and felonous ambitions on the other. In Sejanus Jonson does not fail to see both sides to the question; the satire there also goes both ways. Arruntius berates the Senate for moral laxity (I. 86-104). They sit by silently and allow Silius to be driven to suicide and listen helplessly as the order to burn Cordus' books is given. Arruntius describes his own group as the "dull, noble lookers-on,/ [who] Are only called to keep the marble warm." (III. 16-17). There were no safe courses left for them to follow; "Our ignorance may, perchance, help us be saved/From whips and furies." (III. 20-21). Jonson, in following Tacitus in this dual-fronted attack avoids easy moral polarities and preserves the larger sense of general decay.

By illustrating blocks of history Tacitus reveals the larger political changes. He takes no class sides but censures alike the new men, the aristocratic class and finally the emperorship itself whose incumbents were the third party in this record of political decay. It is true that the old aristocracy produced the moral ideals, but they had failed as a class to preserve them in their actions. Acquiescence

became habit, a fusion of lethargy, complacency, cooperation and opportunism. The aristocracy was at the mercy of the Emperor at the end of the civil war. They had to accept the victor and his form of rule. Then, for many, the best policy seemed to seek posts in the new regime. That was the beginning of the end.

XI

Tacitus was concerned with establishing that point in Roman history when the Principate took a turn for the worse. The tell-tale signs were the decline and collapse of the Roman aristocracy. It would be an error to treat them separately. Tacitus' primary political thesis is to illustrate how the emperors destroyed the old order, yet how the old order was half responsible for its own demise. If there is an epic strain in the Annals it is of the incipient political dismantling of a nation. He traces tendencies back to Augustus and deposits some of the blame there. But Tiberius' reign was the agonizing "moment"; it lasted for twenty three years. At the end of that period the old aristocracy had nearly disappeared. "Of those descendants of liberty, posteri libertatis, as he calls them, the cruelty of the Caesars had spared but few."[58] Yet Tacitus is even more specific. Book IV opens with the statement that Tiberius was then beginning his "ninth year of national stability and domestic prosperity." To make his point the author emphasizes the full flush of health. "But then suddenly Fortune turned disruptive. The emperor himself became tyrannical — or gave tyrannical men power. The cause and beginning of the change lay with Lucius Aelius Sejanus, commander of the Guard." (Annals IV, i; Grant, 157). In choosing to dramatize the rise and fall of this man, Jonson chooses not only one of many dramatic possibilities from among Tacitus'

materials, but the one pivotal career which Tacitus understood to be the initiator of those forces which led to Rome's final political decay as he saw it a hundred years later. Sejanus' career illustrates the epic theme which gives the Annals their cohesive thematic quality.[59]

There is every indication that Jonson was equally concerned with these Roman themes: Tiberius ruled with Sejanus at his ear encouraging his fears. Tiberius then became cruel. Men grew to hate his tyranny and their animosity increased his anticipation of plots. The ambitious were able to rise, meanwhile, by carrying out the purge. Nevertheless, "in Tiberius' reign, although the issue is a foregone conclusion, there is some conflict between good and evil; there are dramatic antagonists to Tiberius."[60] It is the crucial time not only for the few good men but for a whole government and the cause of liberty. Latiaris states the condition of the times:

> Methinks the genius of the Roman race
> Should not be so extinct, but that bright flame
> Of liberty might be revived again—
> Which no good man but with his life should lose—
> And we not sit like spent and patient fools,
> Still puffing in the dark at one poor coal,
> Held on by hope, till the last spark is out. (IV, 142-148)

It is the epic of a dying state, the cease of liberty, the failing of the Roman genius, but at this stage a sense of hope remains. Jonson finds the theme in Tacitus and recreates it in the play. The mood of the work is remarkable because it provides the illusion of a struggle with fair odds where more astute and also later observers could see just how irretrievable the situation was. In the epic scope is an illustration of the cycles of power which contain their ends in the initial phases. The rest is open-eyed assessment of the process. It is a point worth laboring because so many readers have concentrated on the treatment of the work in terms of the hero rather than in terms of the policital situation. In attempting to convey Tacitus' themes,

Jonson's play moves toward political epic.

There is, as part of the historical record, the emotional involvement of the writer. But that concern, that sense of powerful feeling, becomes evident not in express statements of lamentation. It emerges gradually as the sense of scope, of epic loss, unfolds. From page to page both writers preserve a detachment, a sense of irony, responsible because they are never absorbed in misery or nostalgia. The style is business-like. Tacitus can offer in reflection: "Or perhaps not only the seasons but everything else, social history included, moves in cycles. Not, however, that earlier times were better than ours in every way — our own epoch too has produced moral and intellectual achievements for our descendants to copy. And such honorable rivalry with the past is a fine thing." (Annals III. 55; Grant, p. 146.) The writer remains outside his theme speaking of the cycles of history causally. Yet there is a sense in Tacitus, as in Jonson, that progress meant decline, that once set in motion the results were inevitable, that any change meant so much more lost of those times which once were golden. There was the sense in which the state itself was guilty, where all men were servile and all Catos were gone, the awful awareness that history was running down. The essential warning was that tyranny was slowly obliterating the old morality. It is not an account of war and destruction but the end of freedom and the old class structure during times of peace. Sejanus played the villain's part in hastening the death of a dying class. They had already lost their legitimate role in the actual governing process. They sought only to preserve the show of older dignities and honours. When they could no longer be used as a political tool, the emperors found even this activity to be annoying and potentially dangerous. A whole class was victimized by the changing milieu.

## XII

There arises from the efforts of both Jonson and Tacitus a sense of reservation and paradox necessitated by their roles as political historians, by the nature of the state structure itself and as the result of personal dispositions. These qualities enter into the basic structures of their works, giving rise to critical discussions of both authors. Jonson's apparent unwillingness to take sides politically, his ostensible tendency to waver between parties and principles has been cited by Ornstein as a major fault. Yet Jonson's position in relation to his work may be clarified by an account of Tacitus' loyalties.

Tacitus approached his subject in a variety of contradictory ways. That was the fascinating quality of his work. He was never only the angry satirist, the republican moralist or the tragedian of the empire. He was also a political realist. He could never condone corruption, yet he understood the logistics of power. Tacitus recognized that expanding the empire meant despotism in the capital and that liberty un er a republic meant abandoning the empire. That was Rome's dilemma. There was something sinister about Rome's imperial power, but something also necessary. Tacitus was forced to concede that powerful monarchs were required to consolidate the country, repress rebellion and maintain efficient guard against foreign invasion. The times would not allow a less efficient, more libertarian rule. But where there is resignation, there is little joy. Roman rule always had two such sides and the recognition of this is a new mood for history (and for Elizabethan drama). The mature political thinker could not allow himself to be overwhelmed by moral indignation. The idealist and the realist were forced to make peace with one another to some

reasonable extent. It was largely a matter of broadening definitions. One could point to the values of Roman life, the culture, the security under the emperors. From the same circumstances it was possible for such a skeptic as Corneades to see that the much celebrated justice of Rome was really only a matter of the will of the strongest. If Jonson seems politically confused it is because he, too, saw the rationale for supporting both sides of the issue. Such characters as Arruntius support both republican and imperial values. Tacitus' critics have claimed that "as a thinker, he was an imposter - no philosophy, no system in his head, but confusion and a jumble of half-baked ideas."[61] But his inconsistencies are a credit to his mind. No single dogmas circumscribe his work. He respects the record of ambiguities. Ronald Syme states that "Tacitus' views on men and government are ambiguous, necessarily so, for they reflect the historical situation."[62] It is grounds for defining the same ambiguities which one finds in Sejanus, the strong loyalty to a government which yet must be censured for its excesses. It is in the very nature of political man that it is so. "The love of liberty and the love of domination spring from a single root, with good or evil ensuing."[63] Tacitus was hostile to the corruptions of the monarchy and invoked the old ideals as the basis of his assault. He was not hostile to monarchy itself.[64] "For peace and stability, the rule of one man cannot be avoided."[65] The danger was that with stability, the society atrophied and liberties slipped away. Security can be too dearly bought. These were the circumstances under the new politics, and the historian's mind was forced to vacillate between the logistics of morality and of realpolitik; they posed to every thoughtful man living under that regime, a personal crisis. Compromise meant servility which was a concept foreign to a

true Roman. One finds a record of those who chose the philosophy of death as opposed to dishonor. The times made either life or integrity impossible.

At one more remove from the themes of the play already described, there is the Jonson who also appreciates the political ambiguities of Tacitus. The difficulty for Jonson is that ideological vacillation (if, indeed, it is) endangers the unity of his work. Though the monarch could be a tyrant because of his personal vices or because of the temptations of the power structure, yet the office is never attacked. Jonson's moral senators live out this paradox in every political statement. Sabinus resists all manner of rebellion which Latiaris suggests by way of temptation, though his hatred for Tiberius' vices is extreme. "No ill should force the subject undertake/Against the sovereign, more than hell should make/The gods do wrong. A good man should and must/Sit rather down with loss than rise unjust." (IV. 163-166). Beside Jonson the satirist and moralist, there is the obedient subject, though it was a more enlightened and cynical response than a mere bowing to Tudor anti-rebellion propaganda. Given the times and the tasks of government, the potential efficiency of monarchy cannot be superseded. Such paradoxes arise in the nature of the political life itself.

In Tacitus there is implied a continual struggle between moral ideals and political expediency required for the efficient manipulation of power. Tacitus' reputation as an historian has been hotly discussed for over 500 years and primarily upon this point. Likewise, the criticism of Jonson's play revolves essentially around the question of whether Sejanus is the statement of a politician or of a moralist, assuming as most critics have, that it cannot be both. The reality which appears to have forced itself upon both writers, not without regrets, was that survival under such political times as Rome knew

in the first century entailed a separation between public conformist statements and private beliefs.

Elizabethan England may be too narrow a context in which to consider Jonson's reading of history, but the period from 1559 to 1648 was, for the whole of Europe, a period of religious wars (during which Tacitus generally received much attention). It was a period of power politics, of the rise of religious states and of absolute monarchs. Medieval ideals were giving way, throughout Europe, to rule by expediency forreasons of state. "The influence of Tacitus was reinforced by that of his admirer Machiavelli, who had himself taken a long hard look at the conflicts that arise between morality and reasons of state, and given precedence to the latter."[66] There were respectable men who advocated the necessity of an outward show of loyalty and hidden inner beliefs. Tacitus, himself, practised a kind of "quietism" during the last years of Domitian's reign. Lipsius "argued that religion is the prince's business, because it affects the state deeply, but there is no point in persecuting heretics who stay quietly at home. External conformity is enough for the prince to expect. For the individual, external conformity is a small price to pay for avoiding civil war. In private, Lipsius probably supported republics; in public he defended monarchy. He conformed to Catholicism, Protestantism and Calvinism where his residence required it."[67] The idea of the renaissance humanist whose ideals could be generated into actions was coming to an end. Yet, outward conformity and inward dissension was not a happy solution. For the Roman Stoics who could not endure the compromise, it meant a long, brave, but then pointless process of self-elimination. Jonson's play is a dramatization of this issue which arises from the new conditions: the conflict between morality and reasons of state.

Few readers in the Renaissance recognized this central paradox in Tacitus' work. They were inclined to use him as a stock moralist oras a Machiavellian.[68] Adaptability and willingness to suscribe to the new government no matter how great the loss was Tacitus' view. Resignation gave rise to resentment, even moroseness, but there were no alternatives. Jonson is, perhaps, one of the few renaissance commentators on Tacitus whose work reveals this essential paradox.

XIII

The Annals contain a history of political rhetoric in the first century. It was not the speech making of a free society. New forms of duplicity were invented by practitioners of oratory who used words to manipulate men against their wills and to achieve ulterior motives. Jonson makes this one of the themes of his play; language becomes action. He, like Tacitus, reconstructs those various kinds of arguments by which men deal in politics. There are the speeches of flatterers (III. 666-68), Tiberius' false tributes to the Senate (I. 439-53), the forensics of spies (IV. 127-130), the lying of false witnesses (III. 179-89), and a sampling of self-justifications in terms both calm and legal as well as impassioned and idealistic (III. 407-60, 23-29). There is the rationalized logic of the temporizers (IV. 293-98), Macro's declaration of absolute opportunism (III. 714-49), Tiberius' remarkable letter which condemns by innuendo and vacillation (V. 545-648). Drama becomes the reasonable medium for illuminating those moments of history in which rhetoric controls the fortunes of men.

Naturally there was a distrust of such oratory. An ability to perceive the true intent in men's words was commensurate with an ability to survive in "modern" political circumstances. Jonson supplies a

battery of asides designed to prevent the audience from missing the significance of devious rhetorical devices.[69] Tiberius is a master orator as he is in Tacitus' Annals. Jonson demonstrates at length both in translated and feigned speeches Tiberius' ways of manipulating the Senate by showering them with the jargon of constitutional power and republicanism. He placated them repeatedly by offering, verbally, powers which the Senate was never able to reclaim in practice. It was unavoidable that Tiberius should take into his service men who were also crafty orators. "The orator of talent, turning prosecutor to make a career or win the favour of court and ministers, dealt in confiscation and exile, in judicial murder or constrained suicides."[70] The abuse of eloquence for the sake of greed was a tactic of policy gone awry. It is Jonson's intention to work like the historian in exposing the bloodying tongue of such as Afer, for it is part of the historian's purpose to assess political oratory, to expose its superlatives and abstractions, the fraud, sentiments and posturings of politicians.

The exposure of rhetorical practices is expedited by the care with which Jonson translates the Tacitean speeches and the skill with which the historical speeches are matched and illustrated by the feigned ones which Jonson devises for the play. It is the dramatist's task to supply historical characters with speeches according to their historical roles and deeds. Jonson works backward from effect to cause; knowledge of motives, of human ambitions and of the variables of rhetoric are required. It is not merely a task of imitation but of study. As a satirist Jonson is keen to reveal the differences between words as they seem and the true intents of the speakers. The most complex practices are employed by Sejanus and Tiberius upon one another. This rhetoric is the equivalent of the jargon of Jonson's confidence game sharksters and marketplace knaves, though Sejanus deals with crimes of the greatest magnitude. The play is veritably a catalog of deceptive

rhetoric and duplicity. (This theme will also be enlarged upon in a later chapter).

## XIV

The prosecution of alleged traitors "was an opportunity for the unscrupulous orator, promising rich rewards for what Tacitus called 'a dangerous and bloody form of eloquence.'"[71] Sejanus turned this into a business, attracting men to the trade with promises of wealth. Delators and informers became one of the more sinister aspects of Roman life. There are legal explanations. Rome did not have a public prosecutor. This function had to be carried out by individual citizens. It had a double attraction for the ambitious. There were spoils and the favor of the Emperor, because those accused were frequently men pointed out by the ruler as enemies. "Under Tiberius Caesar there was such a common and almost universal frenzy for bringing charges of treason, that it took a heavier toll of the lives of Roman citizens than any Civil War; it seized upon the talk of drunkards, the frank words of jesters; nothing was safe— anything served as an excuse to shed blood, and there was no need to wait to find out the fate of the accused since there was but one outcome."[72] This was Tiberius' specific means of maintaining his safety on the throne. The emperors feared assassination and made it a policy to seek out the cantankerous and to strike first (II. 248-59). Those loyal men who censured manners and policies were stricken down with the few guilty plotters in great numbers. This practice began in earnest under Sejanus' directing. He alone had the Emperor's ear, "aggravated and intensified his suspicions. He knew how Tiberius' mind worked. Inside it, for the eventual future, he sowed hatreds. They would lie low, but one day bear fruit abundantly." (Annals I. 69; Grant, p. 72). Tiberius lived in fear of Agrippina and the Germanican line. That, above all, was Sejanus' work. The Emperor, himself, could not take action, a course too obvious and too demeaning. It was

better to hire a group of willing agents to do the dirty work. If anything went wrong, he could eliminate them at will. But the treason laws were extended far beyond the family feud.

"An especial object of fear and loathing to the entire senatorial class was the operation of the law of treason (maiestas) and the opening it gave to the detested class of informers or delatores."[73] The Roman law was decidely deficient in its description of the treason law. Originally it was never employed against any save known plotters and armed rebels during times of war. Charges of mere defamation could often not be made to stick. Under frightened tyrants, those guarantees were disregarded; "when the public safety came to be intimately connected with the safety of one individual, the danger was that serious penalties devised to meet serious crimes would be made to apply to trivial ones assimilated to the same legal designation."[74] The vagueness in the law Roman rulers found to their advantages. It was the perfect instrument for tyrants; for Nero, it became a virtual method of rule. Delators were not long compelled to bring clear and fair charges against the defendants. Jonson plays upon this injustice to the fullest. Silius was condemned for having given too much service to the Empire, more than the Emperor could repay (III. 88-91). It was construed as a form of slander (though legally absurd). Justice reached a nadir of corruption (III. 209). Tacitus presented case after case of trumped up charges, hasty trials and oppressive punishments, all with the pessimism of a man who observed with hindsight. Likewise, Jonson elevated to the central position of the play, the two trials which Sejanus had engineered on made-up charges. It was an important theme in its own right though part of the larger political processes, the elimination of the Claudians, the debasement of the Senate and

Sejanus' own rise to power. Without the corrupt treason laws these other courses would barely have been possible.

This legal phenomenon is easily related to Tacitus' interest in the initial phases of Rome's decline. According to the Tacitean record it was Tiberius who, after a long interval, revived the treason law. It was the signal act which Tacitus understood to be the turning point for Rome and it was Sejanus who urged him to it. Earlier the law applied only to betrayal, incitement or sedition. "Action had been taken against deeds, words went unpunished." (Annals I.72; Grant, 73.) Under Augustus the first case for written libel was tried. Eventually mere words were grounds for prosecution which resulted in the sinister befriending of a proposed victim in order to incite him to self-incrimination (Jonson illustrates this practice through the baiting of Sabinus, IV. 93-232). Sejanus won the privilege of practising against men by convincing Tiberius that all words eventually became deeds and that time must not be lost in securing his safety. Tiberius' fear made him a fool, but the world has also marked it as part of his shrewd political wisdom. Tiberius took no chances.

It was Tacitus' way of rendering history, namely to "suggest that perversions of justice were due not to faults in the legal system or to bad precedent, but to Tiberius' own inventiveness in the cause of evil."[75] Tacitus claimed that all who were friends of Agrippina were innocent victims. A man need not be guilty even of libel or slander to be prosecuted. The real accuser was Tiberius in his assault upon the Claudian household. Silius was the first, potentially guilty of extortion, though "Tacitus says the treason-charge was the cause of condemnation and 'amicitia Germanici perniciosa', "[76]

This unfortunate aspect of Roman political life supplies much of the atmosphere of the play. One by one members of the senatorial group are attacked by informers and forced into silence or suicide. Tiberius' part is made clear, despite his show of impartiality, by the consent he gives to Sejanus to wipe out the friends of Agrippina (II. 139-330). At Silius' trial Tiberius blinks at an inhumane use of the law allowing Varro to be both his accuser and one of the judges (III. 199-208). Such practices grow until Arruntius complains in the fourth act:

> May I think,
> And not be racked? What danger is't to dream,
> Talk in one's sleep, or cough? Who knows the law?
> May' I shake my head without a comment? ....
> .....
> No place, no day, no hour we see is free -
> Not our religious and most sacred times -
> From some one kind of cruelty." (IV. 304-7-312-14).

Treason had become the catch-all charge, "The complement of all accusings! That/Will hit, when all else fails." (IV. 343-44). In the play as in history an abuse of the law was a means by which treachery was practised, an occasion for deceptive rhetoric, a cause for the fall of the senatorial class, a fact which contributed to the long epic decline. Jonson gives proper dramatic emphasis to the encounter in the second act during which Sejanus "persuades" Tiberius to use the laws against Agrippina. Sejanus' plans for the destruction of the Germanicans are based almost entirely upon a usage of the treason laws. The initiation of this "legal" practice which led to Rome's decline according to Tacitus, Jonson makes the most prominent political agreement reached between Tiberius and Sejanus in the play. Inthis structural emphasis Jonson adds a dimension to his interpretation of history.

XV

It was not only resentment of criticism which provoked Tiberius' use of the treason laws (though Tacitus explains that hostile poems first touched off his wrath), but also an insecurity due to undefined principles regarding succession to the throne. This issue with all its parties and contenders is a way of introducing the specific historical factions which appear in Sejanus and of explaining their motives and allegiances. A select number of great households supplied the rulers of Rome; the Julii, the Claudii, the Aemilii, the Fabii and Valerii. All were involved in Caesar's ascendancy to power. Family tactics were improvised on the basis of the struggle for power. Coalitions were made and broken. Envy and rivalry were always just under the surface because no clear legal means for appointing the successors to the throne had ever been established. Blood propinquity, primogeniture and senatorial approval were all common concepts. But there were many variables, one of which was sheer power. This constitutional shortcoming placed all but the most popular emperors on the defensive. The emperor could trust few of his relatives as close advisers. He was driven to hire "new men" without family grudges or ulterior motives and to pay lavishly for their loyalty. Meanwhile, because the senatorial classes almost invariably felt hostile toward the man in office, they often linked up with the competing households hoping that in exchange for their support, they would regain some of their old dignity (II. 215-222). Thus, it was possible for some to support Drusus, Tiberius' own son and yet remain loyal to the Germanican household because Drusus, himself, was affectionate toward Drusus (Jr.) Gaius (Caligula) and Nero. This could possibly account

for Tiberius' coolness at the time of Drusus' death since he had been a firm opposer of Sejanus (I. 548-56), and a sympathizer with Agrippina. Drusus was the recognized prince. Once eliminated, Sejanus could swell the rumours that Agrippina was busying herself in preparation for placing one of her sons on the throne, perhaps before Tiberius' natural death (II. 230-34). She had her reasons, after all, since evidence was strong that Tiberius had Germanicus poisoned. Agrippina had, in fact, landed in Italy craving revenge (II. 222-29).

It may be argued that those senators who befriended her out of loyalty to her husband's memory and in order to groom the favor of the young princes had intended to have the effect of an opposition party. They claimed to be supporters of virtue and a good deal of their sense of honor was invested in the cause. But in this family contest, they were not the central targets. The deaths of Agrippina's most vocal supporters was only a preamble to the extermination of the family, a kind of incidental harassment, men thrown away in a dynastic struggle which engulfed and passed over them. They were the waste products of a far greater power struggle over the succession between the Julian and Claudian lines.

The whole contest was aggravated and complicated by Sejanus who not only incited Tiberius to action, but worked toward his own ascent to the throne through the elimination of all the legal heirs. Early in the play his plot against Drusus, the sole contender from the Julian line becomes evident. It would seem that the Claudian heirs would naturally rise to prominence to take the murdered Drusus' place. It is chillingly ironic that Tiberius, himself, aided in their advancement as a prelude to their calculated destruction (III. 52-63). The Emperor's cold complicity is the crucial factor in Tacitus' account and Jonson was rigorous enough to follow it through. Tiberius' grip was

firm. When Sejanus, himself, sought to advance his station by marrying into the Julian family, the Emperor recognized that he, too, was attempting sacred ground (III. 623-29). Then, with a bizarre kind of loyalty to the family's purity, he arranged for Sejanus' replacement. Tiberius did not want any successors to threaten his rule (III. 648-60).

Tiberius, distrustful of Gaius, even in his last moments "hesitated about the succession." He had a grandson, but Tiberius Gemellus was still a boy. Gaius was popular because of his father and for that reason Tiberius hated him. Claudius was available but his "weakmindedness was an objection. Tiberius feared that to nominate a successor outside the imperial house might bring contempt and humiliation upon Augustus' memory and the name of the Caesars. He cared more for posthumous appreciation than for immediate popularity. Soon, irresolute and physically exhausted, Tiberius left the decision to fate. It was beyond him." (Annals VI, 46; Grant, p. 224.) The Senate was too weak to rule; thus, they were compelled to join in the dynastic struggle in order to promote various contenders for the throne. Family politics, constitutionally undefined and potentially inflammatory, gave rise to the use of severe repressive measures. In such a way the senatorial class was fatally drawn into the fray.

The problem of the succession was one of Tacitus' major themes, a political factor which explains the atmosphere of intrigue, competition and faction which looms over Tiberius' reign. Tiberius was afraid to appoint the heir to the throne for fear that it would lead to his own early death. Yet, the apprehension which his indecision raised could not have been more devastating. Elizabeth, likewise, delayed the appointment of her successor. It was politically useful for her to keep her own counsel on the subject, but it caused no small ferment.

Jesuits flooded England with plans for an elected monarchy and justifications of regicide on the grounds of religion. Parliament was eager to settle the problem, yet it was one topic they were forbidden to discuss. The question haunted her reign. If Jonson intended Sejanus as one last shot at the problem of the contested succession, he was too late, for by the time the play came to the boards, James was securely on the throne and the country was some several months free of the problem. James was far more promising than a Caligula and the issue was no more a timely one. Such a fact may have greatly influenced the reception of the play. On the succession problem, Sejanus had missed its chance. Nevertheless it is a major constitutional issue in the play.

## XVI

As a work of art and of history, Sejanus presents acute problems for the critic, particularly because Jonson seeks to work consistently according to the standards and criteria of two disciplines: drama and history. It is no less a problem in Tacitus criticism, a fact which, in itself, promises to cast some light on the kind of synthesis Jonson achieved. For the historian, art must be subordinate to the ends of history. Its techniques may be employed to prevent historical writing from becoming a pastiche or a mere chronicle of facts. There is a crucial point at which foreordained concepts of art force events into their own moulds or at which history becomes the material for building illusion. Defenders of Tacitus would claim that history must be the work of an artist before it can be genuine history. Defenders of Jonson could also claim that tragedy is not genuine until it is fully controlled in the disciplined manner of the historian. Verity adds

gravity and authority to tragedy. Moral intensity and the weighing and balancing of episodes as in a play, gives direction and point to history. The economy of drama, if borrowed, forces the historian to choose soundly and correctly. The conciseness of art aids in the subordination of facts, the enlarging of others. Drama adds interest to fact, informs men and events with life. Art teaches men how to paint scenes. But facts must, themselves, suggest the techniques by which they are illuminated. For the same reasons I would argue that Jonson's sense of the play was determined by his understanding of what the material demanded by way of dramatic interpretation. Critical theories come after that fact. In the end the play is a kind of paradox. Jonson believed that history should be the work of an orator so long as he used the rhetoric appropriate to history and that drama was the right medium for illustrating political truths without falsifying the essentials. The powers of the orator and of the artist are clearly related. Sejanus was an effort to demonstrate Jonson's ideas on history and tragedy and, in effect, by laboring in so calculated a way to perfect both in a single work, he implied that these disciplines could be combined without conflict. Tacitus sets the example by seeking to fulfil the functions of the moral historian through a concentrated use of artistic devices.

In writing thematic history, art supplies useful guidelines: the order and purpose supplied by a sense of plot, hints of genre as a means of creating an interpretive mood, the conciseness of a work designed to comply with the rules of proportion and singleness of purpose, the rise and fall of a single man, a streamlining of characters to their essences through conventionalization, the use of irony, satiric asides and commentary, the heightening effect of language, feigned speeches and dramatic encounters, themes introduced indirectly

through formal debate. Tacitus made use of all of these methods.

Truth to history continually prevented literary conventions from compromising factual validity. Tacitus often admitted contradictory facts, discussed the uncertainty of his sources, demonstrably relying on several. Yet, Tacitus could still point to decided trends. Rome was going in directions, the implications of which seemed clear to him. From the facts, multiple and sometimes contradictory, he was yet able to establish epic and tragic themes: the disappearance of Roman virtue in public life, the abuse of the laws, the aspects of Tiberius' tyranny, the decline of the old aristocracy. Jonson wrote with a similar care to demonstrate that his material was not made over to fit rhetorical patterns. Yet for the sake of artistic unity he edited and chose carefully from his sources, further polarizing the moral issues, further high-lighting the trends and techniques of Tiberius' tyranny, providing more explicit examples of rhetorical duplicity and political treachery, but with a meticulousness of imitation which would not violate the spirit of the original, for in so doing he would have thrown away the source upon which the play's authority was based. Jonson advanced a new degree of scrupulousness with which the artist employed the techniques of his craft in treating history. Where Tiberius is found to be like a stock tyrant, there Tacitus applied rhetorical coloring to establish this quality.[77] Jonson made use of the variables of art in the same way in creating character. The same holds true for the themes discussed above. Syme observes that, "Roman history gave scope for poetry and for high politics, notably the catastrophe of the Republic."[78] No man could live through that era without responding to the trends of decline and corruption which were behind it. History is so much more than a narration of fact, for in that, it hardly achieves anything of value.

The achievement is in the combination of poetic sensitivity and political history. "Did not the tragedy of the Caesars embody a sequence of dramatic themes, with ambition, power, and crime recalling the House of Atreus?"[79] A writer, observing these things, may turn to dramatic poetry to express the discontents of his own times in a record of the past. Both Jonson and Tacitus believed that political accounts contained their own records of tragedy and suffering. Both were too devoted to matters of political causation and relationships to abandon themselves to the tragic muse conventionally set out. Tragic situations were not served by political crises but followed from them. Nothing was left to the mysterious; it was a quest for the tragic in a "modern" mood, a true paradox for the artist, for he became a literary creator, himself captive to the materials he chose to treat. For Tacitus, at any rate, the laws of history remain uppermost. He is no historical novelist, though epic structuring influences his outlaying of the record.[80] For Jonson, Tacitus' historical methodology and his artistic techniques, must have inspired his own dramatic experimentation toward achieving a more responsible synthesis of history and art.

XVII

The historian considered, as part of his craft, the writing of speeches in keeping with the acts and personalities of his subject characters. This is by no means license to reinterpret the speaker but to set out the habits of his mind more graphically. The tradition began with Thucydides who often could not recall exact words but found it necessary to record exchanges in order to give an apt sense of history. The "general purport" was the primary goal.[81] Verbatim reports could actually confuse through copiousness and diffusion. These "made" speeches were polished rhetorically in

order to illumine events, probe minds, establish causes, reveal temperaments. They were not extraneous displays of declamation but parcels of evidence which contributed to an understanding of history. A decidedly dramatic quality pervades the Annals based on a long-established tradition. Narrative was unable to reveal so precisely the inner characters, habits of thought and motives of men. Jonson merely enlarges the practice revealing history entirely through dialogue. Narrative is absorbed and converted into expository speeches. History, in the process, is turned fully into drama. Jonson used the precedent to further reveal the rhetoric of politicians at work. In Jonson careful attention is paid to capture the essence of the historical man primarily as a political type. There is skill in his imitations, reliable, uncontorted by the conventions of spectacular drama. Tacitus' speeches were his models, many of which he translated directly into the play.

Between 650 and 700 of the play's 3,256 lines are drawn directly from Tacitus, and Cordus' defense of history (III. 407-60), which appears to agree with Jonson's own views to the extent that it is suspect, is drawn almost word for word from the Annals (IV. 34-35; Grant, p. 174).

XVIII

Tacitus understood that it was largely the wills of men which determined historical events. In Walker's words "character is the motive force behind events throughout the history; the scattered references to 'Fate' do not disprove this. The attribution of any event to 'Fate' is usually made with skepticism, or resorted to when Tacitus confesses himself unable to understand what has happened. Often 'Fate' is mentioned simply to underline the impression

made by events whose real cause, as the history itself has made clear, lies in human character."[82] Because the human will is the drive force of history, then the mind, as it is revealed through words and actions, is the subject of the historian's inquiry into causes.

Aspects of character are chosen which reveal the essence of the public man, the predominant qualities which effect his political dealings. These in turn become "typed", (though they often contain many personal and varied details), because it is a way of patterning political relationships and emphasizing themes through repetition. If characters in history are made too unique and individual, they gain in fascination, but lose in credibility, relevance, universality. It may be argued that the technique of the moralist-satirist is to throw the figure "out of kilter" in order to expose a dominant foible. But the type-character in Roman history is arrived at by another process — the elimination of all irrelevant traits which have no causal bearing upon the problems of state.

One may conclude that Tacitus' Tiberius is a malignant force, that it is his nature to hate the good. But there are always intimations of causes for his actions not required for the stock literary type. The historian's type-character grows from the creation of a particular man whose behaviour conforms to frames of reference established by the observation of similar men. Yet, as an historical depiction, Tiberius surpasses all previous tyrannical figures. There is a sense in which he does hate the good, not because it is his evil nature to do so by definition, but because the times, his fear, his cunning and penchant for secrecy drive him to it. Tacitus' psychology is subtle. There is a capacity in Tiberius for cruelty, and for heartless destruction of others. There is a driving quest for fame though he knows the degree

of his imperfection. On the other hand, Tiberius is no psychopath nor is he excused for his deeds. He is a master in cunning and dissimulation. They result both from his inner nature and from his complex political situation. He torments good men, yet senses the fault; meanwhile, he feels how the morality by which they live condemns him and his revengeful deeds. Tiberius, envious and frustrated, has the power to turn his rage outward upon society where lesser men could not. It is Tacitus' thesis that the Emperor, because he was absolute, sought only a good reputation which failing, caused him, to the detriment of all Rome, to destroy those who, living, embodied the old morality by which he was judged. Such a characterization is more subtle than the stock tyrant.

The opportunist <u>par excellence</u> was Sejanus himself, a man with great potential, unwilling to wait for advancement by conventional means. He had no regard for tradition, but used personal skills, innuendo, gossip, rhetoric, sex, flattery in order to rise where one man had the power to lift him. The new creed was based on the policy-tactics required for seeking and keeping power. Egotism, arrogance, chameleon changeability and an irreligious lack of scruples were his traits. Informers were a special sub-category whose procedures have already been described. Neither patriotism nor humanitarianism prevented these men from ruining the innocent for their own advancement. The good of the commonwealth was their cover for greed. They encouraged strife, pumped up false reports, hunted for discontentment and nurtured it into punishable offences. Sejanus and Tiberius are among Tacitus' more complex type-characterizations, specific yet representative portraits. So delineated, together with the maze of flatterers, delators, rhetoricians, stoics, moralists, they make up the members of the Tacitean political society.

Jonson devised a new concept of characterization for purposes of the politically orientated historical play based upon or resembling Tacitus'. Neit er stock types nor studies in psychological complexity, his characters are yet intricate and complex portraits of men engaged in the political life. Jonson created them according to their historical positions, enlarged upon their recorded speeches, and simplified according to the themes they represented (so long as facts and essential traits were not falsified).

Jonson's Tiberius remains relatively undisclosed. Sejanus, himself, appears a kind of power-machine whose politic style is revealed in place of the man. The intricacies of those policies explored, require a control group, foil characters, whose honesty and virtue are contrasted with chicanery. Tacitus was not inclined to depict characters better than their behaviour warranted; as an historian he did not have to. Germanicus was the only fully virtuous character in the whole of Tacitus. He had both goodness and greatness. Nor was Tacitus alone in his opinion of the man. Suetonius and Cassius Dio both present similar pictures.[83] Quite rightly, then, Jonson portrays him early in the play as a model of moral integrity. The forced economy of dramatic procedures caused Jonson to "emphasize" characters more according to their political associations. Agrippina, since she was on the "right" side, for example, was also given "right" character. Jonson thus appears inclined to make good characters slightly better than they were: Agrippina, Silius, Terentius (see Appendix D). It was necessary to bring the clarity of theme in a short space, which Tacitus developed over hundreds of pages. Yet historical context and a refined appreciation of political causation make the play more than a tussle between villains, foils and martyrs, morally set out. There is the fullness of history which is reflected

in the complexities and ambiguities of character.

Tacitus makes Sejanus bear a huge responsibility for the sufferings of Rome. Tacitus' hatred of him is barely disguised. The source of the feelings arose from Sejanus' treatment of the house of Germanicus. Tiberius is never excused for his treachery, but neither is Sejanus excused for his part in encouraging the Emperor's practices against the Senate and the Claudii. Sejanus had brought ruin to many houses of the aristocracy. He was, for Tacitus, a study in evil. But Tacitus did not abandon himself to caricature. He compounded a deliberate picture, act by act, of a man whose career was wicked in the final analysis almost beyond human ken. Tacitus gained a kind of dramatic effect out of the absoluteness of Sejanus' depravity, but accounted for it in rigorous social and political terms. The new man opportunist was not a bogey-man but an actual phenomenon. Such a figure perhaps attracted Jonson's attention because he was a genuine example of an average man whose career was yet utterly depraved. Jonson leaves the vice tradition behind; his Sejanus preserves the qualities of an historical personage. It was in Jonson's interest neither to exaggerate, sentimentalize, pity nor hyperbolize this character. He portrayed a potential villain-hero in a way which was suitable for serious political drama.

It is possible to think of Sejanus as a misguided and angry young man whose career represents the tragedy of wasted potential. Tacitus, himself, tells his readers at the beginning of Book IV of the Annals that Sejanus didn't have a chance, that Tiberius was ever in control of the situation and knew how to time it, knew how to throw away his clients when they became useless to him. That the Emperor spoke his mind freely to Sejanus "was hardly due to Sejanus' cunning; in that he was outclassed by Tiberius." (Annals IV. 1; Grant, p. 151).

Sejanus could be pitied, because his naiveté foredoomed him, because his followers were loyal to him only because he enjoyed the Emperor's favor, because they deserted him in a crisis (save Terentius), because he would inevitably be cast aside by the Emperor when he became a threat (Sejanus himself had taught Tiberius how to act when he sensed danger), because Tiberius had chosen him for the task knowing that his elimination would not provoke class alarm.[84] But the theme of befuddlement which comes to a Bussy overwhelmed by the treacheries of the active political life was neither Tacitus' nor Jonson's purpose in writing about Sejanus. Tacitus does not confuse a political st dy with personal sympathies. Sejanus was "audacious", "untiring", "secretive", and "ready to incriminate others". He possessed a "blend of arrogance and servility, he concealed behind a carefully modest exterior an unbounded lust for power." (Annals IV.1; Grant, p. 157). He could be lavish but also busy at labour in his practices. These are the important details, not the private man but the public manipulator. The self-consciousness with which Sejanus engaged upon his course of action and the helpless clear-sightedness of those who anticipated his moves are the points Jonson meant to study.

The full details of Sejanus' fall are not given. Tacitus withholds them till well into Book VI. The first hint comes in Book VI. 3 that Sejanus had hastened his fall by initiating a plot to slay Caligula for which deed Sextius had actually been chosen. It was not necessarily the request to marry into the royal family as the play suggests(III. 23-29), but a security leak much later on which resulted in Tiberius' change in policy. Satrius Secundus had been suggested as an informer against Sejanus (Annals VI. 47; Grant, p. 224). The actual truth will never be known. But the image of the betrayed Sejanus, based on thin evidence, was not part of Tacitus' view of his

career. More important, the grounds for Tiberius' change of heart are kept in mystery. Tiberius' actions were more often enigmatic than open and Tacitus sought to preserve this impression. Jonson follows.

Tiberius was a complex character because so much depended upon his will, yet so little was revealed about him. There is a sense in which Tacitus was baffled by his own creation. Tiberius was evasive, sometimes appearing heroic and at other times a monster. For a man so skilled there was fear, "but fear was modified by some respect."[85] Syme states that Tacitus, himself, must have been indebted to Tiberius. "The Tacitean Tiberius is a familiar and fatiguing subject." He is a supreme orator and a crafty statesman, "sombre, reticent, and sagacious."[86] As an orator "Tiberius weighed well his words, they were full of meaning or deliberately ambiguous. That is to say, a style of discourse congenial as none other to Cornelius Tacitus."[87] These multiple aspects resulted in the Tacitean portrait which Jonson copied. Tiberius' speeches supplied the crucial evidence about the man and Jonson translated them directly as often as the drama would allow. The letter from Caprae, read aloud in the Senate, was the moment of climax in the play. It had dignity, was concentrated, carefully calculated for its effect. It was the perfect example of how a word of criticism could destroy a career, or of praise, establish a man for as long as the favor lasted. Tiberius knew how to gain his effect by innuendo. With each new secret revealed, though discounted as gossip, he raised suspicions. Yet he was free of all responsibility for the deeds which followed the doubts he had planted. Jonson recognized the dramatic qualities of his style, how his words had power to mend or destroy careers and made that letter the predominant feature of the final act. Tacitus had originally elevated this event to great dramatic prominence in the Annals. That it could serve as it does in

Sejanus would not appear theatrically viable. Yet the letter illustrates the very epitome of the themes on political rhetoric and the power which makes for tyranny. This was the Tiberius Jonson wished to capture.

Jonson found it necessary to eliminate many of the facts of Tiberius' career, primarily because they had no bearing on his relationship with Sejanus or the Senate. His dealings with the provinces, his frugal life in Rome, his true desires to abandon power, his acts of mercy, especially early in his career, are barely suggested. Such behaviour is still subject to interpretation by the skeptical as politic hypocrisy. His hatred of flattery, his offering of old powers to the Senate are duly recorded in the play, gestures which later historians have been willing to concede as genuine.[88] But for Jonson, as for Tacitus, these are the plainest tricks of the tyrant. Jonson makes dissimulation the whole key to his character. Tacitus claims that "of all his self-ascribed virtues Tiberius cherished none more dearly than dissimulation. So he greatly disliked disclosing what he had suppressed." (Annals, IV, 71; Grant 192).

Tiberius remains an enigmatic and elusive character. His roles are many and evasive; the hedonist condemned for his debauchery, the Emperor fearful of family factions, the new prince who was suspicious of the Senate because they opposed his form of rule, the potentially tragic figure, isolated and alone, forced to bear the weight of rulership, the private man craving flattery, security and immortality, the cunning politician and rhetorician ruling according to the needs of the state, the man whose conscience had been burned out by the exigencies of government, the man sensitive to personal criticisms and willing to exert his power to crush private enemies, all appear in the play. A. W. Ward, as early as 1899, discusses Jonson's

Tiberius as a triumph in psychological characterization. So powerful is this figure that Ward suggests that the play might better have been named "The Triumph of Tiberius". Ward believes that Tacitus was the inspiration for Jonson's stroke of masterly characterization. Tiberius represents the "incarnate hypocrisy of tyranny masquerading in popular legal forms."[89] Moreover, Ward indicates no sense of contradiction in the fact that Tiberius is both a psychological figure and a theatrical type. He suggests that such a complex historical character is new to the English stage and has strengths where Julius Caesar is weak. Thus, while Tiberius may have been a man whose capacity to do evil is great from the outset, nevertheless he enters upon many phases in the course of events which lead to his final stance of fear and brutal attack. In such a way Tiberius serves both as a psychological study and as an archetypal tyrant usually found in the writings of philosophers and tragic poets.[90]

Jonson's Tiberius is a psychological portrait to the extent that human will, even where unfathomed, leads to political events. Yet he is, in the manner of Tacitus' Tiberius, even more concertedly drawn as the grand tyrant.

> Augustus well foresaw what we should suffer
> Under Tiberius, when he did pronounce
> The Roman race most wretched, that should live
> Between so slow jaws, and so long a bruising. (III. 484-87)

Tiberius' relationship to the action is never monodimensional. He has many interests and many sides which, pointed out singly, make political sense but which, in concert, make him dense and mind-defeating. Tiberius is slow, deliberate and mysterious to those who do not think as he does. The policy by which he rules is very much an extension of his own personal temperament. Sejanus instructs him

in power politics but Tiberius adds to these lessons a certain timing of his own which makes him victorious. Tacitus outlines such traits. Sejanus "knew, Tiberius reached decisions slowly, but once the outburst occurred there was a rapid transition from grim words to terrible action". (Annals IV, 72; Grant 192). Therein enters the mystery of his character, his very remarkable ability to employ policy as occasions required and according to the desires of his own mind. This is the origin of "causes" in the play. Nodiscovery of plots or rebellions give rise to Tiberius' withdrawal of support to Sejanus; only the final inscrutable working of his mind is allowed as the cause for Sejanus' fall. The impression Jonson creates is that all courses are absolutely in the control of one secretive mind. That is tyranny whether or not the logistics of that mind can be worked out. Jonson manages to preserve this vision of the Emperor, to combine the anatomy of policy with the enigma of the man. Before him, Tacitus had prepared the relationships between the man and political events. Without that balance, few of the other events would make sense. As an almost non-character, Tiberius is, paradoxically, a brilliant historical reconstruction.

Tiberius' appearance in Tacitus and subsequently in Jonson may also be accounted for in terms of the Roman view of psychology, the portrait of the static figure, as opposed to the developing personality. It is a theory which holds true for other characters as well. One may ask whether Tacitus has not abused Tiberius, violated his nature by supplying one set of opinions about a man whose behaviour had changed from one period in his life to the next. Tacitus indicates neither the growth nor accumulation of experiences of a "real" man. His Tiberius

has no inner emotional life. Tacitus does not show an increase in depravity but simply uncovers by degrees the man who was never less evil than he appeared in the last years of his reign. To the modern psychologically oriented, the account of a man in such a way seems malicious and prejudicial. But the Romans had a more static concept of the individual. Man had a central personality core which was fixed. Only various facades and posturings could conceal what that man truly was.[91] The growth of Tiberius' tyranny was merely an exposure of his innate capacity for ill-will. Only the circumstances had changed which allowed him to vent his spleen, unchecked by those who once were able to contain him. For such a reason Tacitus is able to deal with Tiberius as a tyrant from the outset and to read his early promises as false and hypocritical. The Annals give an account of his dissimulations, the space between his heart and his words, seeking always to expose the man behind the mask.

Because of the Roman view of psychology, it is unavoidable that a study of policy should also concern itself with character. Historical writers are concerned with the men who are actors for political ends. To deal with dissimulation is to deal with the traits which have otherwise appeared to indicate personality change. While the Roman view may appear naive and primitive, it is both capable of subtle variations and useful for explaining political processes. It is not my intention to prove that one concept of characterization is categorically superior to the other, but that the Tacitean portrait-character has properties which cannot be matched by the "emerging character" concept for purposes of illuminating political causality. It is the nature of politics, itself, as a business of striking effective poses in order to win power, which has given rise to the static character concept. From the point of view of the ruler, it is necessary

to be constant as a man so that the calculated roles required for successful statecraft can be constructed. Bacon was, perhaps, one of the first explicators of the politician as a performer. His essays form a catalogue of Tacitean themes and types: Of Simulation and Dissimulation, of Great Place, of Empire, of Delaies, of Cunning, of Suspicion, of Ambition, of Negotiating, of Faction. Practical thinkers concerned for the future of government can not afford to be baffled by the nature of political techniques employed both by legitimate rulers and false imitators. It becomes every man's task to learn the nature of dissimulation, position, motivation, ends. Bacon described the diverse degrees of openness and secrecy. In his sixth essay he cited Tacitus for his authority, naming Tiberius as the dissimulator and Augustus the practitioner of policy and arts.[92] Psychology and character are devised for the purposes of political history in Tacitus, closely related to rhetoric and public oratory, policy and political ends. For men in high places personal corruption manifests itself in political actions as well as in private indulgence. Such a view of character is employed by Jonson in Sejanus.

The characterizations in Sejanus have for these reasons often been misunderstood; but again I think the rationale behind Jonson's choices lies in the nature of the history he represented. Tacitus' creation of the "type-character" as part of his techniques for dealing with state issues is the clue. Sejanus' critics in the nineteenth century did not think Jonson possessed the genius for designing complex human characters, men as unique psychical entities. They could not conceive of reasons why he did not wish to, especially in tragedy. Now it is possible to see that the complaints are irrelevant. Roman political conditions produced new behavioral patterns, the strategies of policy in statecraft. That is an issue which the play raises for

purposes of comparison with contemporary times, a theme virtually endemic to the Roman play. There is cause to think that Jonson believed reasons of state began, anew, to dictate political behaviour as they had in first century Rome. In so far as men lived by policy, the psychological character was a misleading approach to the problem. The type-character in Sejanus is really a new form of imitation based upon the observable patterns of political life. There is verisimilitude of an exact kind, rendered to establish the essence of the political actor. Political truths arise only when the complex relationships between the posturings of politicians are understood. Renaissance dramatic techniques had not produced the kinds of characters Jonson required. Jonson, like Bacon, came to the discovery of the political type-character through Tacitus.

## XIX

Stoicism was a natural outgrowth of a system where public life was so precarious. It was not the study of how to live but how to die well. Men, condemned to public life out of duty or even desire, had to fortify themselves against mishaps as a prerequisite to engagement. Honor they established as the only cause worth living and dying for. Baseness was the greatest evil. It was not easy to decide whether this philosophical "by-product" of the Imperial system was the life force of liberty, or a doctrine leading to futile idealism and waste. Tacitus could not decide. The Stoics in general believed that man's life was determined, but that inwardly he had a free choice between good and evil courses. Full of the grossest logical contradictions, yet conditions gave rise to the rationalizations which provided the most acceptable

form of consolation. Where misfortune struck, there the Stoic abandoned himself to the greater design. Nevertheless, they believed that fate could not touch a truly virtuous man. It was little more than a brute assertion of the intellect over external vicissitudes, including prospects of death. Silius died, a perfect Stoic in the play, resigned to prove himself sufficient to tyranny by depriving the powers of prosecution of their expected victory.

> The Senate's servile flattery, and these
> Mustered to kill I'am fortified against,
> And can look down upon; they are beneath me.
> It is not life whereof I stand enamored,
> Nor shall my end make me accuse my fate.
>
> .....
>
> Look upon Silius, and so learn to die.
>
> (III. 329-33, 338).

Yet it must be observed that while Tacitus admired such courage, he could not subscribe to it wholeheartedly. Men dead can do nothing further for their cause. It was his nature to deal with temporal proofs. The Stoics gave none. Their willingness to withdraw had none of the effect which pacifism has sometimes been capable of. They were unable to force evil men to search their hearts. Jonson dutifully records Tiberius' ironic remark that he had been deprived by Silius' hasty death from showing his mercy. Thus, Silius' act was coolly dismissed (III. 344-47). The Stoics were living out of their times, for heroics as a form of persuasion depend on the existence of a moral conscience. But reasons of state logic had a greater hold upon the ruler and his clients. Value standards had changed. Individual importance was replaced by the abstractions of the commonweal.

Yet Tacitus' views on the Stoics remain mixed for, in fact, they were among the few who opposed the tyranny of the emperors.

Theoretically, they were not opposed to the constitutional arrangement, but to the moral licence of the rulers who plagued Rome. This is the force of Arruntius' complaint (IV. 373-409). Yet Walker has demonstrated how easily their position resulted first in the hero worship of those men of the republic whose deeds cannot be separated from political causes, and how their support for the Senate against the monarch often resulted in anarchistic theories.[93] In this way they differed from those republicans who merely looked back to the old times for moral reasons. That may, in fact, have also raised Tacitus' suspicions, for such a group could not participate constructively in the government as it was. The political and moral grounds for protest can hardly be systematized. Quite rightly Jonson's characters alternate between positions since it was not a finalized issue in Tacitus. To a large extent the Annals is almost a tract in Stoic "politics". Political forms were indifferent matters for the Stoics as they were for the historian. It was the "man" in the office who determined the benignity or malignity of the government. Since few rulers lived up to the standards of the Stoics, they insisted upon their rights to oppose. For years they were tolerated as long as they avoided political activism. As fears grew, especially under Tiberius, Nero, Claudian, and Domitian, they became victims of the principate. Juvenal indicates that their sins were "the paying of honors to the memory of Brutus and Cassius."[94] But their passionate devotion to republicanism was sometimes a mere excuse. Bitter and defiant, their careers could end only in trials and death sentences. They were students of death, using politics as an excuse for a manly exit, urging friends to immortalize them in their writings. Walker has pointed out their own peacock-like, self-righteous vanity. "The attempt to avoid

the vice of servility leads to the vice of self-glorification, to further oppression, and to yet another avenue for the opportunists."[95]

In contrast to the Stoics, Tacitus offered a policy of "quietism". Mendell claims that the kind of political style Tacitus most admired was of "those who do not brave the lightning or gain fame by a melodramatic end with no advantage to their country but arrive at a higher plane of true glory by self-controlled discipline combined with energy and patient effort."[96] In Agricola, there was to be found "no insurgency, no fatuous parade of independence, to invite tattle and tragedy."[97] Domitian had a bad temper; he was secretive and unrelenting. There was no point in aggravating him unnecessarily; "great men can live even under bad rulers". If there is "animation" and "energy" with "submission" and "moderation" such a man may win equal fame with those who have climbed to their deaths.[98] Here Tacitus strikes at the motives of the Stoics and compares them with the ambitious who climb pinnacles of fame "with no profit to the state". Thrasea Paetus on one occasion walked out of the Senate in protest "thereby endangering himself without bringing general freedom any nearer." (Annals XIV. 10; Grant p. 318). Again, in the Histories, Musonius Rufus' portrait is given, a student of Stoicism who began to lecture to the equestrian companies on arms and the dangers of war. He provoked ridicule and boredom. Some were amused, others wished to eliminate him. His moralizing could only be described as "untimely."[99] All this was of no avail for Tacitus, despite the admirable political and moral attitudes they promulgated.

For a reading of Sejanus this mixture of attitudes in Tacitus presents a difficult problem. Jonson introduces the moderate Lepidus and makes of him a man worthy of admiration. Sabinus, too, is worthy but of his death there is no dramatic evidence. Silius' Stoic death

stands as the characteristic example on that side. In the character there seems little to fault, yet he was rash where Cordus maintained a calculated calm. The two charadters, not tried consecutively in actuality, are here juxtaposed, (undoubtedly for reasons of dramatic economy) in such a way that comparison is invited. Silius is tried first; that is significant, for it prevents his death from serving as the climax to the scene. Jonson might easily have reversed the trials. Clearly that was not part of his design.

It is not a problem which allows for a full and conclusive answer. Sejanus has more passages of invective than any equivalent portion in the Annals. Arruntius' speeches are Jonson's invention and they display Jonson's characteristic moral vigor. The play pursues the dark alley of tyranny and treachery without blinking. Yet the tragic mood is created by the very fact that there is an inevitability in the nature of things. Silius' stoic death demonstrates that point. It was not Jonson's intention to undermine the portentous gloom with the optimism of a Lepidus. That man too, though he avoids the delators, is sympathetic with the cause and overwhelmed by the sweeping reversals of fortune, despite his keen analysis of Tiberius and his dissimulations. The tragic mood, the sheer political realism, the recognition of the limitations in political variables, prevents the satiric spleen from inciting to arms. It is a play of intellectual discovery. It raises no idealisms, proposes no calls to freedom, rebellion, patriotism, tyrannicide; it is not propaganda. The play as a "statement" reveals frustration, loyalty, disillusionment; it is about knowing what political structures and political alternatives are as part of the intellectual equipment of the man of integrity. In adopting that stance Jonson parallels Tacitus remarkably closely. Stoicism is a

futile gesture, collaboration with tyrants unacceptible, republicanism unrealistic. There is neither acceptance, nor protest, nor silence. Walker senses it even in Tacitus' own attitude toward "quietism". As time passed, it seemed more difficult for the historian to reconcile himself to the peace he had kept under Domitian. Tacitus had perhaps failed the cause of virtue, relegating himself to a class of "successful time-servers."[100] Neither course was wholly satisfactory. The dilemma was part of the tragic crisis inherent in the political life itself.

XX

Jonson's representation of Tacitean thought was not only a contribution to Tacitus' reputation, but was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that Tacitus was already a known writer in1603. He was not only the subject of study but of much controversy as well, and the victim of much prejudice. As an interpretation of the Annals, Sejanus, itself, was subject to judgement in the light of the various positions on Tacitus already held. Tacitus has always provoked strong and often contradictory reactions. "One finds him wise, or a pathological liar: his style is impressive, or empty. He has been in turn considered an enemy of the Christian faith, a fount of political wisdom, a guide through the labyrinths of human character, an absolutist, a revolutionary, a biased historian, a pure stylist - and stations between."[101] As an avowed Tacitean play, at least in its printed form ("To the Readers", 11. 35-38), Tacitus' reputation is one further explanation of why the play may have been prejudged in its own times. Simultaneously a

discussion of his reputation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries will show how Tacitus' writings have given rise to the same problems which appear in subsequent criticism on the play, especially with regard to the debates between political necessity and social morality and between republicanism and monarchy.

Renaissance politicians had a special interest in Tacitus. They, too, were confronted by problems of power and Tacitus was one of the few ancients who dealt with them directly. Boissier stated that a comparison of Tacitus' history with his contemporaries "will clearly indicate even that the commencement of political history, that is to say of modern history, is already to be felt at times in Tacitus." He was a political realist who, in consequence, was ransacked by every aspiring statesman for examples in policy, "the art of disguising feelings, of devising dextrous deceptions, of ingeniously beguiling one's enemies, on occasion one's friends. In the petty Italian courts Tiberius had come to be the model affected by those little village tyrants, and their one object in reading the Annals was to learn to behave like him."[102] Princes read Tacitus in private and denounced him in public, eager to preserve power and disguise their sources. Yet for many, Tacitism was equivalent to Machiavellianism. It is difficult to know how much that stigma, which had been placed upon Tacitus by 1600, could have affected the reception of Jonson's play. The defense for Sejanus is that policy must be accurately represented in order to be understood. It is the satiric perspective in the play which allows the dialogue between policy and morality to be carried out. In the dramatic conflict these two basic attitudes toward political behaviour arise. This has been pointed out in Tacitus as well. Policy was the law of successful states, morality of humanity,

the contest between them vigorous. But some refused to see the moral side in Tacitus' works.

T citus first came to print in 1470. It took another hundred years for his name to make its way northward. Lipsius' famous edition appeared in 1575. In 1580-81 he was the subject of a series of lectures in Rome by Muretus, who proclaimed his "virtues as a political thinker and stylist, in defiance of an establishment which considered him subversive and obscure."[103] There were a host of other commentators who emerged as the political conditions surrounding them made Tacitus a relevant line of pursuit. The Earl of Essex, an admirer of Tacitus, had a group of followers which included Hayward, Bacon and Savile. Sir John Hayward was first among the English to employ him as a model for the writing of history. Queen Elizabeth was nervous about Hayward's work and queried Bacon "whether there were no treason contained in it?" Bacon gave a witty reply that his only "felony" was theft, referring to the origins of his style. But the Queen's suspicion is indicative.[104] Richard Greneway translated Tacitus' Annals into English and published them in 1598 together with translations of parts of the Histories by Savile. Tacitus could no longer be ignored; the Elizabethans had to reckon with him, especially with his political implications. Machiavelli was on the Index. Tacitus could be used to promulgate his doctrines of absolutism and dissimulation under the convenient cover of history. Yet Tacitus was no friend to tyrants. This is the problem in a nutshell.

The popularity of Tacitus in the period from 1580-1680 has been described as a fashion, a craze.[105] Over a hundred commentaries were written on him during those years. In Europe there were forty-five sixteenth-century editions of the Annals and Histories and in the

seventeenth century a hundred and three more. He had clearly arrived as a force in Renaissance politics. The commentaries were often meditations on aphorisms drawn from the works explaining principles of political behaviour applied to contemporary contexts. What was sought was a system of politics, a body of informed and authoritative political thought; whole systems were pieced together out of his works.

From another point of view, that of established monarchs, Tacitus was held to be dangerous. His hatred of despotism was too easily read as hatred of monarchy. Lipsius suggested in 1572, the year in which the Dutch revolt began, that "the cruel, two-faced Tiberius was the very image (expressa imago) of the Duke of Alba, then governing the Netherlands for King Philip."[106] Rulers resented the comparisons which offered themselves with such monarchs as Tiberius. Muret said that the republican concept was dying out in Europe and that the political state of the west was comparable to Rome under the emperors. Montaigne claimed, likewise, that reading Tacitus was like reading a description of his own times, a criticism of a sick and troubled era. For Boccalini, the Duke of Guise was like Sejanus.[107] In 1626, Sir John Eliot, at the impeachment trial of the Duke of Buckingham likened him to Sejanus: bold, secretive, a slanderer, an accuser, proud, a flatterer. Tacitus was established as a frame of reference, but he was not neutral ground. Charles I recoiled at the idea of being likened, by implication, to Tiberius and sent Eliot to the tower. Contemporaries also believed, according to Burke, that Jonson's Sejanus was a reference to Essex.[108] The oblique references to Elizabeth could have been overlooked. Sejanus had become a veritable touchstone for villany and political conniving, but his relationship with Tiberius made allusions complex.

The two main strains in Tacitean thought were recognized early. Guicciardini explained that Tacitus taught subjects to live morally and prudently, but that he also taught tyrants how to assert their power. Later Guiseppe Toffanin identified these strains as 'red' and 'black' Tacitism. "Tacitismo rosso" was disguised republicanism, "Tacitismo nero" was disguised Machiavellianism. This is the central ambiguity of his work.[109] Related to the "red" is ethical Tacitism. Such men as Lipsius advocated stoicism as a means of survival under harsh conditions. Montaigne commended Tacitus as a moralist and Bacon regarded him as superior both to Plato and Aristotle because his observations were more lifelike.[110] There was an increased interest in the psychology of politics, but it was part of the study of advanced intellectual circles. Bacon was one of the few able to understand the true depths of Tacitus' analysis. La Rochefoucauld in Réflexions morales (1665), asserted that Tacitus was a study in stripping away the masks of dissemblers, exposing man's hidden motives. Nicoles Amelot de la Houssaie compiled a book called La Morale de Tacite (1686), translated into English as The Modern Courtier in which he emphasized the need to bend to the times, provoke no trouble, accomodate princes and humor them as much as decency would allow.[111] These men introduced a third problem, that of survival under new political conditions. It was also not an issue popular with princes.

The idea of the republic was for a time vigorously defended, despite the fact that it was overwhelmed by the rise of absolute princes and their more efficient power-states. Leonardo Bruni, a Florentine of the fifteenth century, made use of Tacitus' histories to attack the despotism of Milan. He argued that Empire killed oratory and destroyed great public servants, that absolutism destroyed the

Roman culture.[112] But republicanism continued to wane until it was a suspect and distrusted doctrine. It was, a s a philosophy, driven underground; red Tacitists were compelled to become "pink", that is, advocates of limited monarchy, critics of tyranny and despotism. There are many further examples. Boccalini wrote a commentary on Tacitus in 1627 as a disguised diatribe against Spain, reasons of state politics, absolutism, a defense of the Venetian Republic. He regarded Tacitus for his republicanism as the "'prince of political historians'."[113] Isaac Dorislaus (1595-1649), a Dutchman, was an avowed republican. (The Dutch Republic, Switzerland and Venice were the only remaining republics.) He lectured at Cambridge on Tacitus, was silenced by the vice-chancellor for anti-monarchical ideas, aided in the execution of Charles I and was himself assassinated in The Hague by royalists shortly after. Milton, too, was involved in a paper war over Tacitus with Salmasius, who was a critic of the parliamentarian system and used Tacitus to support absolute monarchy. Milton called Tacitus, meanwhile, the "'greatest possible enemy to tyrants'."[114] One way or the other, Tacitus was used as stock-in-trade for the rediscovery of political realpolitik under the conditions of the religious wars in Europe and the rise of modern states. His reputation was complex; simplified it amounted to Tacitus the hater of tyrants and Tacitus the exponent of Tiberian tactics. There can be little doubt of his importance to the political thought of the times. More difficult to settle is where Jonson fits into the debate.

First is the phenomenon of Tacitism itself. Jonson in Epigram XCII testifies to the craze which developed among street-corner politicians. Jonson would have been in full sympathy with Rosenhane, the Swedish scholar, who "wrote a dialogue of the four estates in which he makes his parson complain that nowadays even burgomasters

'must be telling us what Tacitus says'."[115] Jonson adds a new cry to the London streets: "Ripe statesmen, ripe". Young fashionable men, gather to discuss the affairs of state, speak of "councils, projects, practices ... what each prince doth for intelligence owe,/And unto whom:" They employ the terminology of statecraft but keep up the impression that these are mysteries, making cryptic secrets out of common information. "They carry in their pockets Tacitus,/And the Gazetti, or Gallo-Belgicus;/And talke reserv'd, lock'd up, and full of feare," affecting all the ways of cunning Machiavels on the scale of petty gossip.[116] The tactics and terminology of Tiberian statecraft had become part of the Jacobean social milieu. Policy had caught the imagination of the "man in the street". But this is a satire of those who use Tacitus for the wrong purposes, not a deflating of the historian himself.

The record of Tacitism outlined above is evidence of the great variety of uses to which he was placed. Such writers as Bacon had to make sense of the welter of attitudes about Tacitus and in the context of his own complex political times.[117] Bacon called Tacitus the most moral of all the ancient historians, primarily because he wrote of men as they were. Bacon was a man of some moral reserve, yet he understood the nature of policy and commended it as one of the best qualities of a stateman. "For if a Man, have that Penetration of Iudgement, as he can discerne, what Things are to be laid open, and what to be secretted, and what to be shewed at Halfe lights, and to whom, and when, (which indeed are Arts of State, and Arts of Life, as Tacitus well calleth them) to him, A Habit of Dissimulation, is a Hinderance, and a Poorenesse. But if a man cannot obtaine to that Iudgement, then it is left to him, generally, to be Close, and a Dissembler."[118]

Policy has an openness and frankness about it such as Augustus used, while Tiberius' secrecy was less fortunate though no less necessary. The dissimulator is unsuccessful because hints fall out that he is not what he claims to be, but the simulator is a man who "industriously, and expressly, feigns, and pretends to be, that he is not." Secrecy is both a politic and moral habit, commendable in all men of public affairs. But the essay is ultimately poised in perfect ambiguity. Simulation Bacon declares a Vice, "That I hold more culpable, and less politicke, except it be in great and rare Matters." for such a mind shows only fear and a "naturall Falsenesse". After carefully differentiating secrecy from simulation and dissimulation from the other two, he concludes: "The great Advantages of Simulation and Dissimulation are three," and treats them as synonymous till the end of the essay, offering in counter-proposition three disadvantages as well, concluding that "the best Composition, and Temperature is, to have Openness in Fame and Opinion; Secrecy in Habit; Dissimulation in seasonable use; and a Power to faigne, if there be no Remedy."[119] Bacon vacillates to such a degree that a large spectrum remains for a legitimate use of policy. The new times forced syntheses difficult to reconcile either to the "reds" or the "blacks". Bacon, himself, engaged in stylistic patternings to record the essential ambiguities of the new political style, proposed a political carte blanche while preserving the phraseology of a censoring morality.

Perhaps the only just conclusion is that Tacitus expresses a variety of political opinions which arise out of the various contexts of history he deals with. His writings illustrate the tactics of tyranny as well as a need for their curtailment, models of flattery and servility as well as a few select examples of discretion. He

represents both the ideals of a lost republicanism and the advantages of absolutism in a work which contains at once tones of moral invective and stoic endurance, yet remains essentially factual and objective. It is this variety in a single vision of history, the multiplicity of moods, the intellectual struggle which takes place in the act of judging the past which challenges the artist. It was Tacitus' thought, but also his attitude toward history and style, which compelled attention. It was not the Tacitus of popular polemics Jonson is concerned with but the historian whose integrity as an observer characterized him as a moderate intellectual. The Tacitean performance which included reservations of judgement, paradox, even indecision, which weighed political causes and penetrated political ambition yet was ever aware of duty, loyalty and truth of argument, was the kind of historical writing Jonson advances in the play.

Systematized political behaviour was a new discipline and Tacitus was among the first to labour toward a style capable of making political analysis possible. Tacitus' style was a mediary step toward the discovery of scientific historiography. Tacitus' work lends itself to easy generalizing in aphorisms and maxims, but the careful reader recognizes cross themes and mixed moods in the plot-structuring, the selection and weighting of events. Tacitus carried the revolution in historical methodology only part of the way. By the end of the seventeenth century he had fallen out of favor, mentioned in the works of only a few scholars until the time of the revolution in France, notably in the prefaces to the translation by Thomas Gordon.[120] Tacitus eventually only appeared scientific in his methods of writing. New techniques emerged during the seventeenth century with which his "empiricism" could not compete. Herman Conring (1606-81), James Harrington (1611-77), and Sir William Petty are those who aided in exposing the

half-science of Tacitus. But the moral politics of the Tudors had to give way and Tacitus was employed during the transitional phase. He had been part of a larger political and social movement, read because he was one of the most clear-headed of the ancients on matters of statecraft. Politics became a new activity for professionals only; the splendid Renaissance amateur lost his place in public affairs. Success depended on experience, and cynicism was the key for making experience useful in terms of political dividends. History was read no longer for admonition but poured over for the principles of political success. Black Tacitism was a part of the thought of the age. Jonson resisted it with characteristic moral vigor and contributed to the development of political drama in which recognition of hard facts meant exposure of men's vices. Nevertheless, his play could instruct in the ways of policy. It was the nature of his material to submit itself to this double reading. But the play contains, in its structuring and techniques, the essence of the struggle. The "scientific" is fused with satiric commentary; the didacticism is tempered by the historian's regard for truth. Sejanus, reflecting Tacitus in Renaissance times, contains something of the same complex relationship between moral art and the new science which was so much a part of the intellectual dialogue of the age.

## XXI

In following Tacitus a certain anti-absolutist dimension was bound to emerge. This was a relatively new brand of drama in which the political order was not recast in a Tudor mold. Authorities

were sensitive to such lines as,

> So soon all best turns,
> With doubtful princes, turn deep injuries
> In estimation, when they greater rise
> Than can be answered. (III. 302-305).

"Doubtfull" here means corrupt. It is a word Jonson was compelled to add in the Folio because without it, Silius' statement could be taken to mean that all rulers were ungrateful, including Elizabeth or James I.[121] The play takes monarchy for granted; the republicans were all loyal. But the work also demonstrates that monarchy is also, by definition, faulty. Jonson was something of a pessimist because history had borne out, too repeatedly for men to ignore, the fact that good kings were rare and that corruption plagued the office. Tacitus claimed with regard to the ascent of Tiberius to the throne: "The more I think about history, ancient or modern, the more ironical all human affairs seem. In public opinion, expectation, and esteem no one appeared a less likely candidate for the throne than the man for whom destiny was secretaly reserving it." (Annals III. 18; Grant pp. 127-8.) Jonson, like Tacitus, made it his task to study, not the curiosities of tyranny but the real patterns, to study its actual political causes. He was sensitive to the ironies involved in monarchical rule. Princes with absolute power were virtually free to rule by whim. Even their clients were as vulnerable to his sudden blows as the victims were whom the clients struck down on the prince's behalf. Criticism from an implicit republican point of view was inherent in the form of historical writing Jonson chose to imitate. This thesis will arise in the next chapter, but it is a Tacitean phenomenon as well.

Tiberius was a superb politician by instinct. Fear, caution and a good sense of timing made him a model which post-Machiavellians could

read as though a portrait by the Florentine. If there was a De casibus pattern in history for Jonson to imitate in the play, it was because Tiberius himself played the dramatist. He did not toy cruelly with his victims; he found it expedient to let them wax before he made them wane.[122] Tiberius engineered the glorious heights, putting Sejanus off his guard with the promises of tribunal powers as a preamble to the final plummet. It is a practice which Sejanus himself taught to the Emperor. It is not safe to censure or strike weakly. That only makes men angry and leaves them free to plot.

> The course must be to let 'em still swell up,
> Riot and surfeit on blind Fortune's cup;
> Give 'em more place, more dignities, more style;
> ...
> and they, in night
> Of their ambition, not perceive the train,
> Till in the engine they are caught and slain.

(II. 260-62, 267-69) When Tiberius follows this exact course against Sejanus, the irony is marked. Tiberius' politic will makes the wheel of fortune turn. Silius at his trial rebuked his accuser: "Thou durst not tell me so/Hadst thou not Caesar's warrant. I can see/Whose power condemns me." (III. 230-32). But proof is not in single lines. It is in Tiberius' entire relationship to the events of state. It was he who could work the populace into a fit of frenzy by a few ambiguous letters.

> Laco. True, and today, one of Sejanus' friends
> Honored by special writ, and on the morrow
> Another punished -
> .....
> And thus he leaves the Senate
> Divided and suspended, all uncertain. (IV. 416-18; 421-22).

Tiberius' greatest power was in his calculated silence and his capacity to lure men into his service, use their ambitions, achieve his ends and avoid opprobrium.

> Tyrants' arts
> Are to give flatters grace, accusers power,
> That those may seem to kill whom they devour. (I. 70-72)

Tiberius was, for the play, the god of the machine who was yet, himself, part of the action, for which reason he must come under the judgement by which the rest of the world is to be judged. His career was more than spotted, for in preserving power he wasted good men and raised others to do the task for whose later demize he likewise reaped the praise. The play is concerned with the fall of the good and of the bad, both brought about by the same "machine". That is the discovery which a study of political causality provoked for Jonson. It leads to the thematic dilemmas in the play. Fate and policy are fused in a single action; chance, determination, will and despotism become part of a single system and series of causes, each phenomenon explained in terms of the other. One is left only with the system. The Romans were antiphilosophical; they were realists capable of looking upon the facts of statecraft without incredulous alarm. The cost, according to Tacitus, was a deadening of that moral vigor which gave rise to the quest for freedom (authentic rather than honorary freedom), and to ideals about human nature. Yet because of political realities, the historian himself was forced to deal in terms of the actual or fail in his responsibility to truth of argument. The logic of political expediency could only be neglected short of risking naiveté. The question always returns to Tacitus as a moralist. "The lessons that Tacitus is supposed to inculcate are by no means unequivocal." He presents the notions of statecraft which must be accepted both by quietists as well as tyrants. "His writings (it can be argued) are morally subversive, not safely to be recommended for the instruction of the young."[123] This follows, in spite of the moral commentary and thematic planning, from the very nature of the events to be narrated. Jonson finds himself in the same dilemma in Sejanus but refuses to withdraw the evidence even for his own safety. It is a play of moral

invective, but also of regrets. The fact and necessity of monarchy co-exists with the longing for the old morality. The play is peculiarly modern in the way in which it reveals the circumstances which condemn men to silence, to pessimism or to self-willed ignorance.

"The Annals convey the traveller through a bleak land, without light or hope." That is Syme's impression ofthe Tacitean landscape. The extent of the gloom converts the history into a symbol of its own characteristic events and circumstances; Jonson creates a similar impression in the play. Fear and fraud predominate. "What abides for ever is discord and tyranny."[124] Liberty has eroded away. There is an epic of decline. There is a corrupt quest for power, the temptations of which few are able to resist. Those who do are subject to harassment. One pattern of tragedy is that in which good men are unable to avoid unjust political oppression, a pattern worked out of true political situations which hold men without possibility of escape. Men are tested for their loyalty and integrity of character under these extreme conditions. Such plot has personal, historical and national implications, for where the very form of government is responsible for the violation of humanity, one must contend with themes both of personal corruption and ambition as well as of national deterioration and decline. Through Tacitus' history, Jonson came to the tragedy of guilty states as well as to the dilemma of the individual political victim.

Jonson believed that the dramatic medium could contribute to the truth of history. The dramatist could reveal moods of outrage and resignation through the characters. Certainly he employed the techniques of the multiple point of view, which drama is by definition, to cover the many facets of political motivation. Since political

events depend largely upon the politic uses of rhetoric, drama is the perfect vehicle for illustrating the variables of oratory. In the heaping up of adverse events something of Tacitus' view of Roman history is captured in the play: the procession of small crises, the words and looks which mount up to the turning points in history. Yet Jonson was able to amalgamate with Tacitus' themes, his own understanding of causes. Pride and cupidity are the anti-social sins. In Sejanus he deals with them in the circumstances in which they nearly bring a whole society to ruin. Tragedy is a satiric situation with more far reaching implications— where human folly becomes human vice and crimes result instead of bad manners. Greed leads to despotism and this, in turn, leads to pessimism or despair. Where the law itself becomes corrupt, there is little hope for the body politic. The Jonson of the satiric comedies is still visible within the Tacitean frame of values.

The final problem for the play Sejanus, as it is for Tacitus, is one of credibility. George Brandes is one of the first critics to uphold Jonson's attitudes toward history. He recognizes in Jonson a vigorous pessimism which enables him to deal with the "beastlike ferocity of first century Roman politics without extenuation and without declamation," signs of a new understanding that political realities are seldom resolved in confession, repentance and reconciliation.[125] By disposition, experience, conviction, Jonson viewed the events of history in a manner very like Tacitus' own. There is a crescendo-like structure in the Annals which results from the calm relentless pursuit of trial after trial, the exposure of deceit, betrayal and hypocrisy. The picture is harsh but accurate. History is the proof, yet as proof always begs the question. It is

finally a matter of challenging the reader's own inexperience. Though the truth is sometimes doubted, yet it is the truth. The only approach is to say for Jonson what Montaigne said for Tacitus: "They who doubt his sincerity plainly betray themselves as ill-disposed to him on some other account. His opinions are sound, and he leans to the right side of Roman affairs."[126] "The Rome of the Annals is rotten with fear and corruption. In each successive book the despotism becomes more harsh, the ruled more servile, the profiteering freedmen and informers more despicable, the few good men more helpless. The abominable atmosphere of this world has been unparalleled in European history until the present age. There were in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries many readers who refused to accept it, not because they knew of any facts to disprove it, but because it 'degraded humanity'. Mankind, they declared, could not have sunk so low. That particular objection to Tacitus' Rome is not likely to be advanced in our time."[127] Because Jonson relied upon Tacitus' world-vision, his play approaches an equivalent degree of severity. The play, borrowing the same strengths, imposes the same challenges to the reader. Yet such a critic as T. S. Eliot thought that Sejanus should not go unappreciated in our times; "of all the dramatists of his time Jonson is probably the one whom the present age would find the most sympathetic, if it knew him."[128]

Important for Jonson are Tacitus' many dramatic techniques, the tragic and epic themes, his characterizations and use of dramatic speeches, the artistic arranging of materials, the calculated delays, the heightened and metaphorical langauge which were all a part of his style. That Tacitus could preserve such fidelity to the facts yet see their broader implications, which were to be clarified through his rhetorical and dramatic skills, is part of his great genius. His

achievement is one source for the origins of Jonson's tragic style. Moreover, Jonson found in Tacitus that kind of voice which both informed and coincided with his own view of human affairs. Tacitus was the subject of some controversy and much abuse in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Jonson, no doubt, had opinions on the matter. Sejanus serves as an interpretation of the man and his work. Jonson infused his materials with the same perspective, sense of irony, republicism, idealism and political realism which he found in the original. It was his task to employ the variables of the drama in such a way that the fullness of the original would be reproduced. That is perhaps the most accurate and responsible of all types of interpretation. But the Annals are essentially a work of history enhanced by the techniques of the artist while Sejanus is a play thoroughly informed by the disciplines of the historian.

## Footnotes

1. The form of government does not matter; as for the notion of balanced powers, it was an ideal impossible to maintain in fact (Annals IV. 33). Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, trans. Michael Grant (London, 1971; first pub. 1956), p. 173. Book and section numbers are taken from the Loeb Classical Library Tacitus, trans. John Jackson (London 1963), because Grant does not subdivide into the conventional sections.

2. Gaston Boissier, Tacitus and other Roman Studies, trans. W. G. Hutchison (London, 1906), p. 137.

3. The World of Tacitus (London, 1968), pp. 116-117.

4. Boissier, p. 139.

5. Boissier, p. 148.

6. Sir Ronald Syme, "The Political Opinions of Tacitus," Ten Studies in Tacitus (Oxford, 1970), p. 122.

7. " ... the educated classes had been able ... to produce a theory of the Principate, representing it as a kind of constitutional monarchy. That was comforting. The Caesars paid necessary homage, not always feigned, for some of them disliked monarchy (notable Tiberius) or shared the normal reverence for the past of Rome; and the appropriate language was artfully employed by their ministers, or echoed by senators not always insincerely." Syme, Ten Studies, p. 122.

8. It is not "quite fair to allege that Tacitus and the historians of his school ignore the good done by Tiberius and his successors; the only thing is that in their capacity of moralists they are more interested in the crimes committed by the princes, and leave the services they rendered somewhat too much in the shade." Boissier, p. 153.

9. The political conditions of Imperial Rome brought an end to expansionist policies, followed by a kind of lethargy which became fatal to the Roman spirit. The army was reduced to the rate of a frontier police force and political tool. The distinctions granted by the Emperors became merely nominal, more often granted to placate the inactive. Such decorations became the subject of mockery and motivation for valorous action was undermined. See Bessie Walker, The "Annals" of Tacitus; A Study in the Writing of History (Manchester, 1952), p. 208.

10. Ronald Syme, Tacitus (Oxford, 1958), II, 583.

11. Walker, p. 116.

12. Tacitus saw from his earliest years the evil men were capable of. Agricola's family suffered during those times. Republicanism had one last fling in A.D. 69, though it was clear that the Senate would eventually resign its powers to another emperor. "If any of Agricola's generation had by any means contrived to cling to the Augustan illusion of a constitutional monarch ideally designed to achieve harmonious development of the social order, they lost it in the year 69. No man of Tacitus' age can have cherished that illusion at all." Walker, p. 164. Such a fact might well give rise to a double response of reconciliation and desperation.

13. Dudley states that under Domitian, Tacitus was oppressed but could not bring himself to join the opposition. Rather he "held aloof from those senators of Stoic views who posed as the champions of freedom." The World of Tacitus, p. 14.

14. Boissier, p. 36.

15. Tacitus, Dialogus, Agricola, Germania, translated by Sir William Peterson and Maurice Hutton (London, 1920), pp. 171, 173.

16. Boissier, p. 35.

17. "Certainly Vespasian's government was by no means very liberal. In armies that old soldier had acquired the habit of order and discipline; he held strongly to keeping all to their duty, and was of no humour to let his authority be contested. We know that he had Helvidius Priscus put to death, and that, for the first time, he banished from Rome the philosophers who, no doubt, seemed to him babblers, harmless indeed, but vexatious. Those severities must have saddened Tacitus, but he felt that the Empire after so many agitations had need, before all else, of peace, and he was grateful to a prince who sought its preservation, even by slightly harsh measures. He must therefore have given him whole-hearted service." Boissier, p. 27.

18. Boissier, p. 20.

19. Walker, p.2. For Walker this statement is everywhere contradicted by the manipulation of fact and rhetoric which Tacitus employed to build up his case against the grievances of his age, that Tacitus was not only a historian but a subtle and sometimes devious orator against tyranny, oppression and above all, Tiberius. She is unwilling to accept his claim to objectivity as one among several criteria. But Tacitus is elsewhere equally positive about his intention to expose immorality and tyranny.

20. Syme, Tacitus, II. 546. This is corroborated by another Tacitus scholar, F. B. Marsh. "A comparison of the accounts of Tiberius in the Annals of Tacitus, the Lives of Suetonius, and the Roman History of Dio Cassius will show that Tacitus was much more careful and accurate than either of the others."

"While neither Dio nor Suetonius should be ignored, their statements can only be accepted with caution and their loose generalizations can be given very little weight." The Reign of Tiberius (Cambridge, 1959; first pub. 1931), p. 272.

21. Walker, p. 257.

22. Syme, Tacitus, II, 540.

23. The Histories, trans. Clifford H. Moore (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p. 83 (IV. 42).

24. Boissier, p. 106.

25. "Tacitus and His Predecessors," Tacitus, ed. T. A. Dorey (London, 1969), p. 123.

26. Cicero, De Oratore, trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham (London, 1967), II. 225.

27. Boissier, p. 44.

28. R. H. Martin, "Tacitus and His Predecessors," Tacitus, ed. T. A. Dorey, p. 127.

29. R. H. Martin, p. 123.

30. If Tacitus is a "real historian his unifying conception will have arisen from the material and will not be imposed upon it by his own taste." Walker, p. 154. This refers also to the sense of artistic structuring which will appear in the work. If patterns related to an artist's vision of order suggest themselves, it is because they arise from the facts and materials. For that matter, any sense of genre must arise from the facts. History tells itself not only factually but suggests the forms which, when clarified by the artist, are the bases for interpretation.

31. Dudley, p. 27.

32. Boissier, p. 52.

33. Boissier, p. 59.

34. De Oratore, II, xv, p. 245.

35. "Tacitus was rather more often praised as an historian because of his interest in causes and motives, and his penetrating analysis of them." P. Burke, "Tacitism," Tacitus, ed. T. A. Dorey, p. 154. This was the belief of many of his earlier commentators. It was the historian's duty to reveal hidden causes. The work must anatomize not psychological motives but political motives. It became traditional in continental history. Jonson was undoubtedly in touch with the continental schools. He tells us he read Lipsius' edition of Tacitus. It could prove grounds for criticism as well as praise. Rene, Rapin and Mascordi all accused Tacitus of having a black heart barely concealed by his wit, playing the philosopher-interpreter rather than simply

narrating the facts. P. Burke, p. 155. But the Italian critics were primarily admirers. The discovery of hidden motives, or better the exposure of the techniques of statecraft, explained how it was possible for absolute rulers to stay in power by manipulating lesser magistrates to their own ends. Sarpi used Tacitus to expose the policies of the Papal court, while Davila understood, from reading Tacitus, how religion was used as a front for political ambition. P. Burke, p. 155.

36. This is an essential difference, for boys in the Roman schools were trained to take up any topic and debate on it pro or con. A good orator could be effective on either side. Thus, when Tacitus is said to be an orator, he becomes immediately suspect. One sees elements of this when the artist must present sample trial scenes such as the one with Afer and Silius in Sejanus, Act III. Tacitus sometimes works in this way in non-trial scenes as in the handling of Augustus' reputation. He invents two prudentes, men of sense and understanding, to debate on the merits of his reign. It is a literary convention which is more dramatic and thus more poignant and memorable than straight narrative. Tacitus argues by suggestion and implication. The pessimistic view is given the final and more persuasive word. But Tacitus would claim still to be presenting all views, yet weighing that one which seems the more compelling. Oratory decidedly figures in the making of history. There is a penchant for drama in Tacitus which Jonson is able to develop more fully.

37. Walker, p. 52.

38. Polybius, The Histories, trans. W. R. Paton (London, 1925), IV, 555.

39. Walker, p. 44.

40. A Collection of Old English Plays, ed. A. H. Bullen (New York 1964; first pub. 1882-89), I, 3.

41. B. N. de Luna has urged that Sejanus is an account of the Essex Rebellion and that "Sejanus can be properly understood only with this background reconstructed ... " Jonson's Romish Plot (Oxford, 1967), p. 8.

42. "In the Roman character there was deeply ingrained a romantic love of the simple and unsophisticated life of the past. It is found in Cicero, Livy, and Sallust. It is found in Tacitus, intensified by his acute dislike of the contemporary political system." T. A. Dorey, "'Agricola' and 'Germania'," Tacitus, ed. T. A. Dorey, p. 14.

43. Clarence Mendell, Tacitus: The Man and His Work (New Haven, 1957), p. 27.

44. Syme, Ten Studies in Tacitus, pp. 124, 129.

45. Dudley, p. 123.

46. Ben Jonson's "Sejanus", pp. 193-94.

47. Boissier, p. 123.

48. Dudley, pp. 16-17.

49. Walker, p. 176.

50. Syme, Tacitus, II, 579.

51. "Though the maintenance of Republican forms in Imperial government would be a source of frustration to anyone who tried to begin constitutional reform, it was a perpetual reminder of former liberties, and might suggest unsettling comparisons to young men who had read history intelligently." Walker, p. 171.

52. Dudley, p.15.

53. Dudley, p. 124.

54. "Pliny would probably have fixed on the Senate as the weak spot in the government set-up of his day and to the restoration of the power and dignity and prestige of that body he would have pinned his faith as the panacea for the troubles of Rome." Mendell, p. 15.

55. Syme says it would not be safe to consider Tacitus "an unqualified admirer of the noble houses. When Roman historians appeal to the ancient glories of the nobiles, it is commonly to review and arraign the pretensions of their descendants. They attack the aristocracy with its own weapons." Syme, Tacitus, II, 565.

56. Syme, Tacitus, II, 572.

57. "There is a tradition that whenever Tiberius left the senate-house he exclaimed in Greek, 'Men fit to be slaves!' Even he, freedom's enemy, became impatient of such abject servility." (Annals III, 65; Grant, p. 150).

58. Boissier, p. 19.

59. During the play Tiberius is in the second and third phases of a four phase career. While Germanicus and Drusus lived, he was tame, a mixture of good and evil; while his mother was alive, love and fear led him to conceal his vices under Sejanus' control though he was savage. After Sejanus was slain, neither love, nor shame, nor fear prevented him from ruling by viscious whim. The removal of all restraints allowed him to follow his baser nature. R. H. Martin, "Tacitus and his Predecessors," Tacitus, ed. T. A. Dorey, p. 135.

60. Walker, p. 78.

61. Syme, Tacitus, II, 526.

62. Ten Studies on Tacitus, p. 139.

63. Syme, Tacitus, II, p. 527.

64. "Tacitus apparently maintained his view that in no circumstances would the replacement of one emperor by another be an object worth fighting for. His view is constant throughout all his works." Walker, p. 181. He was no revolutionary. There resulted a kind of pessimism from the very fact that no political alternatives were open.

65. Syme, Tacitus, II, 547.

66. Dudley, p. 234. (This issue will be developed more fully in the third chapter.)

67. Burke, p. 169.

68. Dudley observes that "men like Tacitus served the Principate and and acknowledged its necessity, but judged it by the values of the Republic." Dudley, p. 26.

69. Tacitus was suspicious of political oratory, especially of the Ciceronian variety which forged content into preplotted sentences and assaulted the ear with alluring sounds where the sense was yet obscure. "Sallust felt an antipathy towards Cicero," and opposed him with his own "brief, harsh, abrupt style that subverts eloquence and asserts the truth, bare but discordant." (Syme, Ten Studies, p. 8).

70. Syme, Tacitus, II, 581.

71. Dudley, p. 112 (quoting from The Dialogues, V, 7).

72. Seneca, "De Beneficiis," Moral Essays (London, 1958), III, 173 (iii, 26).

73. Dudley, p. 111

74. Walker, p. 86.

75. Walker, p. 94.

76. Walker, p. 104.

77. Walker, p. 153.

78. Syme, Tacitus, I, 363.

79. Syme, Tacitus, I, 363.

80. Walker, p. 155.

81. Walker, p. 148.

82. Walker, p. 46. She even asserts later, more forcefully, that "there are no 'divine interventions' in Tacitus; his world has been abandoned by the immortals." (p. 46).

83. Dudley, p. 100.

84. "The Emperor was able to destroy his minister without imperilling the fabric of government." Syme, Tacitus, I. 385.

85. Walker, p. 31.

86. Syme, Tacitus, II, 546.

87. Syme, Tacitus, I. 319.

88. "What the facts seem to show is that Tiberius tried in vain to make the senate a serious partner in the government, and that the attempt failed, not because he gave that body too subordinate a role, but because the part he wished the conscript fathers to play demanded a degree of independence of which they were incapable." Marsh, p. 117.

89. A History of English Dramatic Literature, 3 vols. (London, 1899), II, 336-37.

90. Dudley, p. 82.

91. I am indebted to Syme for the concept of Roman psychology. "The way of thought of the ancients was prone to conceive a man's inner nature as something definable and immutable. A change in observed behaviour was therefore not a change in essence, but only a manifestation of what was there all the time; and, if Tiberius at the end stood revealed as a bad man and a tyrant, it was legitimate to ask how and when the faults of his character, which previously had been curbed by discipline or disguised by craft, at last came to the surface. Syme, Tacitus, I, 421.

92. Bacon's Essays, ed. W. Aldis Wright (London, 1885), p. 18.

93. Walker, p. 177. "The Stoics were indeed the only contemporary group who made any attempt to treat the old tradition as a political reality." Walker, p. 202.

94. Mendell, p. 19 (Juvenal 5. 36). Mendell also claims that Tacitus must have admired them as heroes despite the fact that he condemned them for their violence. Mendell believes that in this censuring Tacitus tried to cover his own guilt for failing to support them.

95. Walker, p. 231-33. It will be my intent in the last chapter to show how this Stoicism affects seventeenth-century English letters, how it is adapted to fit political moods, how it appears in Jonson and affects his concept of tragedy.

96. Mendell, p. 14.

97. Tacitus, Dialogus, Agricola, Germania, ed. E. Capps, T. E. Page, W. H. D. Rouse (London, 1920), p. 245.

98. Agricola, p. 245.

99. Histories, Bk. III. lxxxi, p. 469.

100. Walker, p. 243.

101. Norma Miller, "Style and Content in Tacitus," Tacitus, ed. Dorey, p. 115.

102. Boissier, pp. 149-150.

103. Norma Miller, p. 113.

104. P. Burke, "Tacitism," Tacitus, ed. T. A. Dorey, p. 159. I am much indebted to this essay on the influence and reputation of Tacitus in the seventeenth century.

105. P. Burke, "Tacitism," Tacitus, ed. Dorey, p. 150.

106. Burke, p. 161.

107. Burke, p. 161.

108. Burke, p. 160.

109. Burke, pp. 162-63.

110. Burke, p. 156.

111. Burke, p. 158.

112. Burke, p. 163.

113. Burke, p. 164.

114. Burke, p. 164.

115. Burke, p. 150.

116. The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson, ed. Wm. B. Hunter Jr. (N.Y., 1963), XVII "The New Crie," pp. 39-41.

117. Baltasar Gracián in Oraculo Manual divides and explicates the degrees of dissimulation, this new fact in political dealing. First degree feigning is "(pretending to be what one is not)" and second degree, "(behaving as one really is, but in order to make people think that one is different)." These may be sometimes justified on grounds of state. Aims must be hidden, all emotions held in check. The Tiberian ethic received modern application. Burke, pp. 156-7.

118. Sir Francis Bacon, Essays, ed. W. Aldis Wright (London, 1885), pp. 18-19.

119. Sir Francis Bacon, pp. 19-22.

120. Tacitus, Works, trans. Thomas Gordon, 2 vols. (London, 1728-31).

121. Sejanus, ed. Jonas Barish, notes p. 193.

122. Jonson states in the Discoveries, "And on the contrary: that which hapned, or came to an other with great gratulation, and applause, how it hath lifted him, but a step higher to his ruine! As if hee stood before, where hee might fall safely." (Works, VIII. 593).

123. Syme, Tacitus, II. 521.

124. Syme, Tacitus, II, 545.

125. William Shakespeare: A Critical Study (London, 1898), p. 391.

126. The Essays of Montaigne, trans. E. J. Trenchmann (London 1927), II, 406.

127. Walker, p. 4. A footnote in the quotation refers to criticism of Tacitus on these grounds by Voltaire and Linguet.

128. The Sacred Wood (London, 1920), p. 121.

## Chapter Three

## The Revolution in Historiography and Sejanus as Political History

The so-called "historical revolution", the change in the methods and purposes of historical writing which took place in England between 1580 and 1640, has been the subject of a number of recent studies by students of historiography.[1] Jonson's Sejanus made its appearance while that movement was in progress. Both internal evidence and probability, based upon our knowledge of whom Jonson read and who his acquaintances were, suggest that Jonson's interest in history was significantly influenced by what I refer to as the "new" historiography. To contrast it with earlier sixteenth-century practices is the best way to establish what the characteristics of the new approach are, though one is also beset by the dangers of scholarly redundancy and overgeneralizations. There is no shortage of works both by historians and literary critics on the Tudor "world order."[2] That one can speak of such a unified Weltansicht pertaining to the sixteenth century generally, whether or not it is true in fact, is to indicate something important about that period which hardly accrues to the following century. One of the results of that revolution was the fragmentation of a theocentrically holistic society. Theology, science, history and art become separate and less frequently complementary disciplines. It is difficult to know whether new moods, new conditions in society, themselves, forced the methodological revolution or whether scholars changed the world view by undermining the old. That could result in fruitless debate. Yet it is an important matter insofar as it is necessary to deal both

with the movement in historical writing as a source of Jonson's dramatic method and with the political, social and economic conditions which form the background to Jonson's play. (These are the same conditions which give rise to the new secular, political history.) To speak of an historical revolution is to speak of a revolution in the whole frame of intellectual reference and of the revolution in political thought which took place simultaneously. The new methods altered the way men understood the structure of society and politics. Upheaval and disorientation were, perhaps, the chief results of that period of transition. It was a matter of the gradual dissolution of the medieval cosmology. Such is the range of my study in this chapter and its treatment must necessarily be selective. My purpose is to isolate those aspects of the "revolution" both in methods and in society which bear upon Sejanus as an historical statement and to find out the extent to which Sejanus deals with the characteristic themes of the new history.

## I

The superstructure of sixteenth century historical writing was derived generally from a system of providential rewards and punishments which were believed to be the informing principles of all history. The war of the roses was interpreted as a way in which God confounded the sinful and rewarded the good. The Tudors were able to capitalize upon this medieval concept of history. Theyencouraged the writing of those encyclopedic chronicles which rehearsed the Barons' Wars in terms of divine control. Henry VII's victory was proof that God was on the side of the reigning monarch at last; he was the true elected

ruler. Providential history was made to serve as Tudor propaganda.[3] Thus, historical writings all through the sixteenth century contained a strange mixture of patriotism, propaganda in disguise, moral biography and a record of divine justice. The Italian humanist Polydore Vergil was employed by Henry VII to write a pro-Tudor dynasty history, establishing the legitimacy of the family claim.[4] A new interest in England's mythological heritage going back to Brutus and Cadwallader grew up based, essentially, on the writings of the twelfth-century historian, Geoffrey of Monmouth. Ironically Polydore's precocious skepticism prevented him from giving the desired account. England was not ready for a more critical historiography. Nationalism was more important than historical verity. England had enemies abroad and could risk no internal dissension. History taught, by example, the dangers of rebellion.[5] Treason was a far greater fear than tyranny in the sixteenth-century English mind.

It was the historian's chief duty to present moral exempla, the lives of good and evil magistrates, depicted together with their respective rewards and punishments.[6] Historical writing perpetuated ancient tales and superstitions mixed in with the facts; it preserved national lore, but was hardly critical or scholarly, nor did it speculate on matters of political causation. A science of statemanship could not be distinguished from the matter of the conduct books. Sir Thomas Elyot in 1530-31 wrote <u>The Boke Named the Gouernour</u> giving instruction to young statesmen.[7] He believed that the qualities which made a good ruler were the same as those which made a good man. Sixteenth century historical writing remained essentially medieval, moral, providentially directed, metaphorically structured. It lacked the analytic and political qualities of the scholarly and scientific seventeenth-century historical writing.

The three salient features of sixteenth-century historiography, for purposes of my study, are the De casibus structured biography, the causal role of fortune, and the system of analogies which is closely related to the great chain of being upon which theories of kingship and the social structure were founded. The tale of a rise to power and subsequent fall is the primary plotting pattern not only for scores of sixteenth-century moral tragedies but also for such popular collections of exempla as the Mirror for Magistrates. The type may be traced back to Boccaccio's De casibus Virorum illustrium, and Lydgate's The Fall of Princes (1439).[8] Tragedy, history and moral teaching participated in a single design. It is a legacy so strong that Jonson could barely escape it in the ordering of his own plot because of its value as a means of arranging materials leading both to tragic and moral conclusions. This "fable" relied for its sense of structure upon a causal connection between man's pride, arrogance, ambition and the mysterious forces which control man's fate. It was a pattern related to the analogy of the wheel of fortune whose influence was sometimes identified with the Christian God, sometimes with the pagan gods and sometimes with mere accident or "crass casualty". This force in human affairs represented both the unknown agents which blindly struck men down with pointless malevolence, and the powers of justice which assured the downfall of the wicked. The concept of fortune arises repeatedly, sometimes as a causal factor in history, sometimes as a metaphor for ignorance, sometimes as a principle of divine retribution. Fortune also has a part in Jonson's Sejanus related to the De casibus plotting, but its function is ambiguous since it has little point where human events are explained in terms of secondary causes. The new historiographers rejected both De casibus patterning and the

principle of fortune as a causal agent in history

For the medieval mind a system of order comprehended all elements of creation and within that stratified system each object had its own particular place. The order of the natural world as an extension of the mind of God was recognized as an all-pervasive analogy upon which society itself had to be founded. As the material world progressed upwards from stone to angel, so society went from peasant to king. Such analogies were absolutely credited and binding.[9] It was a habit of logic whereby men were urged to keep their places in society. Upward mobility was a principle practised but never condoned. "Plainly the didacticism of all the sixteenth-century historians was not a conscious choice but was inherent in their very idea of how the universe worked. History that did not teach was utterly inconceivable ...."[10] By similar metaphors drawn from nature it was proven that monarchy was the divinely sanctioned form of rule. The bees have one queen, the body has one head which the hands and feet serve without rebellion. The ultimate metaphor was God, Himself, as ruler of the universe whose agents all legitimate kings were. But such a system of correspondences depends upon metaphor and metaphor depends upon wit which, in turn, sees likenesses between unlike things which are ultimately only "accident al" no matter how established by usage and tradition. Under examination they break down. W. H. Greenleaf illustrates the fallacy of the method from Hooker who in one place cited the head as the ruling member of the body as Christ over the church (Works, VIII. iv. 5), while in another place he rejected the analogy with regard to monarchy because he feared absolutism (VIII. ii. 10).[11] Sovereignty, he claimed, belonged to the entire body. It seems a trivial point, but monarchy was hard pressed for rational defenses and relied almost absolutely upon the medieval cosmology for its intellectual justification.

With the challenge of skepticism to the medieval order, kingship was also endangered. G. H. Sabine states that the "divine right of kings ... never received, and indeed was incapable of receiving, a philosophical formulation.... On the side of intellectual construction it was hopelessly weak. (It) defied analysis or rational defence."[12] Because the world of thought and the social structure were so integrated the one hardly stood secure without the other. An ordered society supported the system. As society changed, the philosophy of history no longer applied to what was, even while the changes in scholarship undermined the security of the social structure.

II

The reasons for the breakdown of the medieval cosmology amount to a definition of the whole concept of renaissance. It has to do with changing political and economic circumstances, the reformation, the rise of modern secular states and with the introduction of new ideas, all of which forced historians to reconsider the records and to reassess what had actually happened in history from more critical points of view. Skepticism was the spirit of doubt and inquiry which caused men to suspend preconvictions in order to re-examine the facts without bias. A few paragraphs from Henry Thomas Buckle will serve as an effective shortcut to the point. He selects Comines as a typically shortsighted and credulous pre-seventeenth-century historian. It may "... be observed, that though he was personally acquainted with statesmen and diplomatists, and had, therefore, the fullest opportunities of seeing how enterprises of the fairest promise are constantly ruined merely by the incapacity of those who undertake them, he, on all important occasions, ascribes such failure, not to the real cause, but

to the immediate interference of the Deity.[13] For Comines, lost battles were sent as punishment to a wicked prince or nation. But a "great and decisive change" was on the way. "Hence we find, that little was really accomplished until the end of the sixteenth century, when ... the theological fervour began to subside in England and France, and the way was prepared for that purely secular philosophy, of which Bacon and Descartes were the exponents, but by no means the creators." Nevertheless: " ... during the greater part of the sixteenth century, the credulity was still universal, since it affected not merely the lowest and most ignorant classes, but even those who were best educated. Of this innumerable proofs might be given; ... "[14] The origins of the skeptical thought which affected seventeenth-century historiography in England may be traced to several sources. In the immediate background was the experience of the reformation. Polemics abounded during that period. History was employed in the defenses of both sides. Protestant apology entailed a reperusal of the records of the early church in order to sort out the real from the suprious. The results were, for the mostpart, extremely biased. As F. Smith Fussner states: "It was the necessity of winning converts, not pure love of truth, that launched (these) historical offensives."[15] Moreover, as the new confessions depended upon the protection of secular rulers, the rise of modern states went hand in hand with the reformation. Church-state politics entered a new phase and efforts to reconcile the two spheres of interest and authority further expanded the historical labors of the age. But past records were still employed essentially as moral tracts and as corroborations of self-legitimization.

The humanists were concerned with the active life. History was employed to educate the statesman.[16] They believed in the perfectibility of society. In spite of scientific, political and economic changes,

they continued to believe in certain ideals: reason, law, order, limit.[17] Their desire was to preserve the fixed order of society and to offer "a justification of the ways of God or nature or society as they are - and hence to identify the way things should be with the way they are."[18] But a new naturalism was bound to appear which would challenge such ideals because they did not influence reality.[19] The truth of the humanists was limited because it depended so much upon what was morally right. That kind of truth had to ignore too many aspects of political reality. M. M. Reese, speaking of the humanists, states, "the only truth the historian needed to profess, in this view (and it was certainly the only form of truth that Shakespeare needed or recognized in his history plays) was a conviction of the justness and rightness of the course he was defending."[20] Nevertheless, the humanists, with their emphasis upon man and the role of the statesman together with their diligent research into the classics and partially progressive concepts of style, made a contribution to the development of historiography.

A more responsible attitude to the facts of political history as the foundation for historical writing came from the south. Beatrice Reynolds notes the emergence of the new historiography in the Italian historians, Leonardo Bruni of Arezzo and Flavio Biondo. These men wrote independently of the humanist biases toward utopianism founded upon the moral education of princes, and freed themselves from the strangling influences of Ciceronian rhetoric. In Laudatio Florentinae urbis, Bruni wrote a true political history, concentrating upon the rise and fall of a city-state as a state and upon the relationship between the rulers and the people. His theme was popular liberty reflected in the Florentine situation, a theme which he urged by repetition.[21] These writers were the forebears of Guicciardini. Their major achievement was in the emphasis upon veracity as opposed to style.

Machiavelli introduced a new political, realistic and utilitarian prince to take the place of the humanist ideal of the Christian prince.[22] Machiavelli recognized the need for a political system based on the actual principles of the management of power and government in the place of moral coaxing. Insofar as Francis Bacon was concerned with the practical measures of effective government, he too "repudiated the moral and historical philosophy of humanism almost as completely as he rejected medieval Aristotelianism."[23] This summarizes the revolution in political thought which had for its target the body of orthadox beliefs belonging to Christian humanism. The result was a threat to the traditional modes of thought regarding monarchy.

The basis in history for the skepticism of these Italian historians was the politicial condition of Italy. Historiography lost its naiveté when the state, itself, was caught in a power struggle which required an understanding of the uses of power in order to survive. Princes living by the old rules of humanism had failed to prevent the domination of Italy by the Spanish, the Hapsburgs and finally the French. Under foreign domination cynicism grew inevitably. Historians took up the task of exploring secondary causes, those which men were able to influence and control. More efficient and coercive measures were required to preserve the state. History became the substance rather than the aid of political thought. Man's desire to protect himself from others and to exert his own power became a basic principle. "For Machiavelli there was no lex aeterna and therefore no lex naturalis. He never even thought it worth while to refer to that conception."[24] A society based on utility was set against the idea of society founded upon divine order.[9] Guicciardini was one of the first of the scientific

historians. He wrote a history of his own city with an eye to describing events in order to derive from them theories of political causation which would be constantly true and useful. He tried to keep his account of events free from his own theories.[25] Machiavelli crystallised one of the polarities taking shape in the Elizabethan mind. It "tended to be divided between a pious underpinning and a realistic shell; and Machiavelli's translators (and critics) attacked him on the incompatible grounds that his morality was abysmal and his advice false."[26] Machiavelli's Florentine History was translated into English in 1595. Guicciardini's History of Italy had appeared sixteen years earlier. Though the Elizabethans were suspicious of the political implications of these men, they read them and were influenced by their principles of history.

III

The Tudor constitution, a body of beliefs and practics far too complex to discuss at length here, must nevertheless be mentioned. England was a monarchy whose king was "absolute" in so far as his power was derived from God alone. Yet the Tudors also spoke of the monarch's powers as a grant made to him by the people through a contract.[27] Moreover, the King required coercive powers in order to execute the law and was, therefore, as the source of that authority, not bound by that law. God alone was the judgeof kings. Yet the prospects of tyranny not only became greater as powers of the monarch increased but tyranny under "modern" conditions was more dangerous because the state had more to lose. The issue was seldom debated late in Elizabeth's reign because it was not permitted, proof in itself that

the crown had too much power over thought and t e press. The extent of the authority of the people through the contract and in parliament was unspecified. The constitution had become a central question.

Only the radical Puritans and recusants ever dealt openly with the issue of deposing kings.[28] Their grounds were invariably religious and polemical but they had their effect upon the development of political theory. So great was the fear, on the orthodox side, that the whole system of non-rebellion and the authority of the judicial system would collapse that the issue of checking the king's power could barely be discussed.[29] Yet after 1588, even from that quarter, reservations arose concerning the unlimited power of the king. The Tudor mystique was dwindling. More skeptical assessments of political motivations were arising. Parliament, itself, was involved in a struggle for greater power and, up to the time of the civil war, built up the case against the king.[30] The new historiography served the interests of the parliamentarians far better than it did the royalists. So much of the intellectual rationale for monarchy disappeared with the demise of the medieval cosmology.[31] The tendency was towards mixed governments which had, nevertheless, to be introduced by men who, for the most part, remained committed monarchists.[32] In such a way republican sentiments were held simultaneously by men who were loyal to the throne. It was a matter of checks and balances, of redefinition rather than abolition. The study of national histories increased during the period. Later, when scholars became even more involved in political debate, these national histories served as major evidence against the monarchy and all its pretentions in the seventeenth century.

Experience in practical affairs became the basis for judgement. Efficient coercive rule became the principle of measurement. Historiography thus found itself at the center of a complex dialogue over the rightful powers of the prince, his relationship to the body politic and the duties of the citizen. It was a constitutional question for which the Tudors had no answer.[33] The adjustments between actual powers altered according to times and circumstances. Tudor monarchs were reasonably successful in making their private ambitions correspond to the public ones. But an awareness of the threat of tyranny was increasingly more present in the minds of the intelligentsia as the century drew to a close and the whole issue remained in various states of compromise and paradox in the writings of all of the pro-government apologists. I will come to Sejanus as a work which, because of its historiographical techniques, is also a political statement suspended between the two trends, the one favoring the necessary defense of monarchs, the other intimating the rationale for greater constitutional checks over the crown.

The constitutional debate accompanied England's rise to power as a modern political state in the context of post-reformation Europe. Older codes of political conduct provided inadequate directives for competing as a nation among nations, each struggling for national power. The new conditions necessitated the adoption of raison d'etat logic. "The myth of a divinely created order had even less justification under Elizabeth than in the Middle Ages, for it was now limited to the national state, and there was not even any attempt to envisage any larger union, the relations among different states being determined solely by material power."[34] The idea of the state emerged as a first principle. Negotiation and defense had to be based upon a science of

politics and diplomacy. Here was one further incentive for ransacking ancient historians. They understood the concept of the state in their own times and dealt consciously with power politics.[35] It was discovered that raison d'état principles were not only independent of conventional moral codes but often directly contradictory. Princes must sometimes violate moral principles for the well being of the state. Such allowances and the range of their permissibility is difficult to measure in any age. Where moralists and promulgators of realpolitik tactics make absolutes of their respective principles there is yet one more deadlock between ideologies. "Raison d'état became the dubious hallmark of the new age. It symbolized the rational acceptance of a divorce between individual ethics and the ethics of states, which knew no law but necessity; and it marked the beginning of modern historicism."[36] It is an age old problem. In the renaissance, arguments between scholars and statesmen raged around the figure of Machiavelli. Historians began to realize that to deal with political events the writer had to deal with the issues of state morality. According to Hiram Haydn, Jonson would naturally incline toward satire and ridicule of the "formlessness of a world in gestation" since he was thoroughly imbued with humanist moral values and remained consistently loyal to the old order.[37] This is both true yet easily misleading with regard to Jonson's appreciation of an emerging political order. Jonson, from his reading of Tacitus and through observation of the dealings of his own age, must have recognized something of the necessity for raison d'état, a problem to be held in suspension during the assessment of an historical account in which policy is responsible for tormenting the commonweal and for ridding that commonweal of its enemies. Sejanus indicates how power has a morality of its own, though it is not necessarily permission for Machiavellian tactics of

a lawless nature. The play is a study of how fine drawn the distinction is.

Where historians turn directly to politics in an age of moral judgement, the danger is always ambiguity. Both Hayward and Jonson wrote of bad men without soundly pronouncing just condemnations. With regard to Tiberius, "Jonson preserves the abhorrence of Tacitus and yet suggests an admiration for the mortal enemy who works through statecraft,... "[38] The moral judgement and intellectual recognition cannot be reconciled to a single position. The new history is built upon a separation of morality from an analysis of both psychology and politics. If the world is a place devoid of grace, forgiveness, redemption, sympathy, if it is totally governed by ambition and duplicity, then survival depends upon having a greater shrewdness than one's foes. The individual may take refuge in humility but the prince cannot. That is the first condition of political self-perpetuation. This is the realpolitik side of the debate. For the good of the commonweal all tactics for standing guard are valid.

## IV

It is with these issues in mind that one can understand what Tacitus came to mean to the Elizabethan intelligentsia as an authority on policy and state. Livy passed out of vogue because he was the historian of the republic. Tacitus was the historian of the empire. "For men who had to live in monarchies, Tacitus was the more relevant; it was from him that one learned the techniques of survival."[39] Tacitus was in the center of the contest between morality of states and christian ethics; "after he had been republished by Justus Lipsius in 1574, Tacitus became the great teacher of raison d'état,...

then for a whole century there blossomed a literature of Tacitists who exploited him politically."[40] The continent produced many lecturers and commentators on him, but England produced her own as well, men in the vanguard of political leadership. There was a group of Tacitists surrounding the Earl of Essex for as long as he remained moderate in his political manoeuvres.[41] Most of these men were intellectuals as well as personal advisers. The group at Oxford included Jean Hotman, Henry Cuffe and Thomas Savile. Camden kept in touch by correspondence. They spread the enthusiasm for Tacitus to those they knew and taught. Sir Henry Savile first translated Tacitus, perhaps through the influence of his brother. Cuffe, himself, was later executed for his loyalty to Essex. Savile and Hayward were both imprisoned after the rebellion.[42] Because of the group and their common interest, the reputation of Tacitus rose and fell with the rebellion. Tacitus became a "known" writer in England and had a close connection with political affairs. The rebellion made Tacitus dangerous by definition. "Tacitus had become practical politics, and the historians had left their posts as observers and had stepped into the arena."[43] Bacon was undoubtedly an admirer long before his writing of Henry VII. Ellis and Spedding, the editors of Bacon's works, havetraced letters back to 1594 which contain Taciteen concepts and allusions. The same must be argued for Hayward whose The First Part of the Life and Reigne of King Henry IIII is full of Taciteen references and maxims. Camden had read and digested Tacitus and admired him for his detachment and impartiality. It was a quality of Camden's own writing. He saw in Tacitus weight, dignity and didactic value as well, because of his objectivity.[44]

That Jonson followed this group and its interests can hardly be doubted. He left testimonials of his friendship with almost all of the members mentioned. At the time of James' arrival in London in 1603, Jonson was residing in the country at Sir Robert Cotton's with

Camden, his old school master.[45] Camden and Selden were present at a banquet celebrating Jonson's release from prison after the Eastward Hoe affair (Conversations, p. 26). Sir Francis Bacon was with Jonson at the time of his parting for Scotland (Conversations, p. 30). The Earl of Essex was one of the central figures in the group of writers associated with Tacitus and wrote the Epistle or Preface to the Savile translation of Tacitus in 1598 (Conversations, p. 32). Jonson admired John Selden for his command of languages (Conversations, p. 50). He praised Savile's translation of Tacitus in his Epigramme XCV. Savile was the man best suited to write the history of England in Jonson's estimation because he "liv'st from hope, from feare, from faction free;"[46] In Epigramme XIV William Camden received Jonson's praises for his work as an historian, while Bacon was, for Jonson, the master scholar, the one who most clearly understood the relationship between sound learning and the well-being of the commonwealth. (Timbers, LXIII).[47] It is their work, methods, theories, uses of Tacitus which had the most direct influence upon Jonson after Tacitus himself.

Amyot in his Preface to Plutarch's Lives (North's translation, 1579) claims that:

> ... the reading of histories is the schole of wisdome, to facion mens understanding, by considering advisedly the state of the world that is past, and by marking diligently by what lawes, maners and discipline, Empires, kingdoms and dominions have in old time bene stablished, and afterward mainteyned and increased: or contrariwise chaunged, diminished, and overthrowen.[48]

It was always understood that history had utilitarian ends and that it instructed in political matters. James Phillips Jr. sums up the principle: "By theorists of all schools, history was regarded as the

final authoritative textbook of political science. In history's account of the rise and fall of nations, men could discover the principles which controlled the destinies of states."[49] But the applications of history had to conform to conditions. As concepts of political causation became more sophisticated the inadequacies of existing explications of history became apparent. This was the complaint made against the sixteenth-century chronologers. Robert Bolton in Hypercritica, or a rule of judgement for writing or reading our Historians (c. 1618) states: "'Christian authors, while for their ease they shuffled up the reasons of events, in briefly referring all causes immediately to the Will of God, have generally neglected to inform their readers in the ordinary means of carriage in human affairs and thereby maimed their narrations.'"[50] The new tendency was for historians to concentrate upon a study of the world in which causation was "primarily material and efficient."[51] The reasons of events must be determined from the events themselves and arrived at through experience which is politically orientated and grounded upon a knowledge of human nature. Events have their own ordinary means which suggest the form which the "proper" historical narrative should take. Historians began consciously to seek that form.

Hayward's history of the Reigne of King Henry IIII, first published in 1597, is a representative example of that new history which concentrated upon political causation; it is an attempt at an objective account free of conventional moral designs.[52] This is not to say, however, that such history lacks power and relevance. Even as a factual account of a specific historical period it corroborates what is known and felt about the present. A political event objectively researched and critically narrated is the most direct way to study the

nature of policy. Bacon states the principle perfectly. "The observation of proportion between one person or one theory and another, makes nothing without example, nor nothing new: and although exempla illustrant non probant, examples may make things plain that are proved, but prove not themselves; yet when circumstances agree, and proportion is kept, that which is probable in one case is probable in a thousand, and that which is reason once is reason ever."[53] This is the case for the universality of particular history. History which illustrates the principles of cause in illustrating particular ones provides its own assessment of the general, for causal necessity is the ingredient which leads to the universal when it is the ordering principle of particulars.[54] A distinction emerges between history as the basis for the rules of political analysis and history as moral exemplum.[55] The two forms continued simultaneously and authors often confused the two, including Bacon, the most political of the historians, in his The Historie of the Reigne of King Henry The Seventh (1622). Yet integrity in the facts was a beginning and that alone was the guarantee of the validity of the axioms.

Such historical writing was easily misapplied in its times, however, for the same reasons that Tacitus could be read as a "monarchist" and a "republican".[56] Political leaders kept a watchful eye upon the new historians, concerned that no adverse parallels with contemporary society should appear under the disguise of historical objectivity. Under such surveillance political history had to be written with great care. Circumstances became even more difficult after 1601 because all of the Queen's trusted counsellors, Burghley, Leicester, Walsingham, had died. She became disillusioned about the inferior politicians who had replaced these statesmen and remarked to an admirer, "'Now the wit

of the fox is everywhere on foot, so as hardly a faithful or virtuous man may be found.'"[57] Her own words conceal a kind of paranoia. The performance of Shakespeare's Richard II on the eve of the Essex Rebellion is a well known example. The objection was to the unavoidable identification of Elizabeth, herself, with the deposed king. Even the most factual history could be turned into propaganda in the right hands. Hayward was imprisoned for his work and examined both by Coke and Popham. His friendship with Essex could not have been in his favour. Bacon, nevertheless, came to his defense, no doubt because he genuinely supported Hayward's history and its methods.[58] Hayward's trial was a test case for the new historiography as Cordus' trial was in Sejanus.[59]

Hayward had attempted to write a balanced and impartial history. But even in effecting that, the historian is in danger since the facts of history make their demands. By misjudging the times, the writer may be made a victim of his choice of materials. The speeches offered by Henry IV as a rationale for hisusurpation of the throne had to be cogent. After all, Henry was successful, a fact which could not be altered. But in late Elizabethan times the subject was too explosive. On the other hand, Hayward was sometimes careless. He was guilty of heightening speeches and scenes and of transferring events from one period of history of another (again like Jonson who, for purposes of designing a play, used events and characters out of their original sequences). Hayward was tempted, too often, to write according to the structural criteria of poetry. He tried to defend himself by arguing that it " ... be lawfull for any historiographer to insert any historie of former tyme into that historie he wright albeit no other historian of that matter have meued the same...."[60] But the defense

was patently weak.[61] Not till Selden's defense of his Historie of Tithes (1618) was a prosecution forced to deal with a work strictly in the historian's own terms because Selden was completely the scientist-scholar whose facts could not be faulted.

William Camden also wrote political history based upon the classical models. From Tacitus and Polybius he "learned something of decorum, a solution to the problem of what was appropriate for a historian to include and what should be omitted."[62] Political assessment in history depended upon the choice and arrangement of materials. Camden was also an antiquarian and a linguist of some accomplishment. He was granted permission to base his Annales; or The Historie of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princess Elizabeth, Late Queen of England on actual government records. The Annales became a historical handbook. As a record of events completed in the past, the reader could see events related to their causes and thus gain practice in predicting future results to be expected from yet unfinished courses.[63] Camden avoided controversy by relying upon records and by presenting all sides of an issue where it was open to interpretation. He demonstrated the technique in his handling of the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, presenting it both as an outrageous deed and as an historical inevitability. In this manner Camden illuminated the conflict between morality and reasons of state from Elizabeth's own earlier reign. Camden's safety was in the fact that he was not concerned with personal faults or blame. He recognized that both Mary and Elizabeth were caught in a sweep of events determined by larger religious, dynastic and constitutional forces. The waste in such affairs could be lamented as tragic but it was not the political historian's purpose to dwell upon it.

Camden's "Baconian methods" led him to speculate on such concepts as the balance of power between nations. He recognized how religion was employed for political ends. He could distinguish between real and ostensible diplomatic goals. Camden did have certain thematic predispositions. He shared the general Tudor fear of rebellion and he was inclined, by personal habit, to support authority. It is the wholly secular quality of his writing, however, which is worth note. Religious biases are unfelt. Moreover, Camden did not shirk from treating political dilemmas. He did not fabricate solutions for the sake of ordering history. He dealt with the "historical necessities which limited human freedom of action and choice in nearly every historical situation. He saw that real historical dilemmas were seldom if ever resolved by good intentions."[64] His concern for freedom placed him on the right side of human endeavor and his willingness to admit human imperfection put him on the side opposing credulity and naiveté. Where causes were not open to him, Camden, unlike Hayward, refused to speculate. He, of all the new historians, was more suspicious of the imagination and of conjecture. Camden's work is characterized by its dignity. He made a special point to avoid treating secrets of state and said so in his preface to the Annales.[65] Camden was doubly safe because his work gained no wide popularity. It was well labored, cool and scientific. It lacked pictorial qualities in the prose and passion in the narration. It was too learned for the masses though it cannot be faulted for that since Camden did not prepare his work for presentation in the theater.[66]

Samuel Daniel's The Civile Wars appeared in a four book version in 1595 with a fifth the following year and a sixth in 1601. Daniel

wrote in the "Epistle Dedicatorie",

> "I haue carefully followed that truth which is deliuered in the historie; without adding to, or subtracting from, the general receiu'd opinion of things as we finde them in our common annalles: holding it an impietie, to violate that publike Testimonie we haue, without more euident proofe; or to introduce fictions of our owne imagination, in things of this nature."[67]

The statement could serve as a preface to any historical narrative, but in actual practice, Daniel meant something more specific by truth in history and "evident proofe". He wrote in verse (because he wished to appeal to a popular audience) but he employed the same criteria for his research as Camden and Hayward. In "To the Reader" prefacing his The Collection of the History of England (1612), he listed his major sources for the work. Daniel took the same pains with documents and selected only those issues which were concerned with the political life (in his words) "onely those affaires of action, that must concerne gouernment."[68] "Integrity" is the chief quality of the politic historian which means relating affairs in their own proper proportion and "Fame".[69] Daniel was unwilling to engage in defamation or praise. This was beyond the true historian's range. He was pointedly concerned with problems of sovereignty, power and policy. He recognized that struggle "by wit rather then [sic] the sword" was an equally valid area of study.[70] In his prose history of the Tudor period in The Collection of the History of England, Daniel assesses the Tudor age as one of corruption due to the increase both in state power and national wealth, an age of counter-parties, political bargaining, spies and intelligencing, of international financial negotiations and of upheaval in the church in which "Religion brought forth to bee an Actor in the greatest Designes of Ambition and Faction".[71]

Daniel's attitudes toward the uses and reception of the new politic[al] history are worth comparing with Jonson's. He was, first of all, pessimistic about society itself. In his history, sequences dealing with ambition, faction, affectation in political affairs are so frequent that these issues suggest themselves as themes. In The Civile Wars Daniel more often dealt with the violations of monarchs than with the threat of treason. It was an important shift in emphasis. He wrote extensively of periods of peacetime intrigue, recognizing that the Tudor period was not like earlier heroic ages of "virilitie ... but more subtle".[72] Daniel was aware of the dangers of writing such analytic history noting that the times in which it has been permitted are rare.[73] There was a final cause of pessimism for Daniel. He, too, sought popular approval for his work and thus began in verse. But he found both an unreceptive audience and verse an unmanagable medium. He, too, encountered the difficulties of combining the poetic process with proper history.[74]

V

Irving Kibner, in a slightly incautious statement, urged that "to assume that there was in England before the middle of the seventeenth century any great concern for historical accuracy as an end in itself is unwarranted."[75] But with the exception of a few genuinely "scientific" efforts historical writing had ulterior motives, no matter how submerged. Certain premises about society, patriotism, religious polemics, public and private morality, were habitually present. Yet in the period immediately preceding Jonson's play, attitudes favoring an objective secular history were in the process of

formulation. Historical truth for Daniel meant presenting the truths and facts of the best records in an unaltered form except insofar as it was necessary to reduce them to a clear narrative form. It meant making art serve the materials and it meant drawing the conclusions which were naturally suggested by those materials; "he was not a partisan but a recorder."[76] Truth of fact was Camden's only reason for writing; such truth determined the "scope and aim" of his work. Only through careful research could "Ignorance ... doubtfull Uncertainty and flat Falsity" be removed.[77] An examination of earlier records with a critical intelligence was a first requirement. Bacon thought that intelligence could only be gained through first hand political experience. Camden made up for such a lack of experience "in his scholarship and in his determination to avoid unwary credulity."[78] The same apologia could be extended to Jonson. "Selden complained that except for Camden's annals of Elizabeth and Bacon's life of Henry VII not a single 'publique piece' of English history was built upon enough research."[79] Suspicion of earlier historical writings, followed by a new disciplined analytic scholarship, was the first step.

The new historiography faced immediate and long range difficulties which are also important to a consideration of Sejanus' future as a play and as history. First of all it found itself concerned with political issues virtually to the exclusion of all others. Camden plainly stated that the "Affairs of War and Policy are the things proper to History."[80] History became the study of an elite power group which controlled the political interests of the state. Historians were discovering that "politics occupy a major role in the life of

every society. They are the public existence of that society and the dynamic of its organizational experience."[81] Such a subject could not be usefully explained in terms of fate or divine providence. Nor was it a matter of private biography. Because statesmen in the Tudor period employed power tactics, discussed constitutional concepts, dealt with factions and social movements, it was necessary for historians to explicate historical events in these terms.

At such a point in the development of the state, intellectuals began to see the dangers, not in urging the analysis of society in the terms of realpolitik for fear of teaching tricks of state to renegades, but in allowing a society to deceive itself about its own practices through antiquated theory. It was dangerous for a society to cling to outmoded beliefs. As a political historian, this was at the heart of Bacon's crusade against the "Idols" of belief. Received opinions were the major block to the advancement of learning; fixed ideas about government prevented men from arriving at a true analysis of policy and political negotiation.

Bacon argued that, "the logic now in use serves rather to fix and give stability to the errors which have their foundations in commonly received notions than to help the search after truth. So it does more harm than good."[82] The only course for the new historian to follow in breaking down the fallacies of overgeneralization was to produce a world in conflict, a world in flux, in short, a world in accurate and specific detail. The interest in antiquarian research was one way to complexity; the interest in the multiple factors of political causation, another. The greater the complexity of analysis, the more difficult it is to reduce history to formulae and to make easy predictions for the future based upon the past. Political

history, according to G. R. Elton, if it is responsibly written, will attract "the sceptics, the particularizers, the conservatives, and its appeal to them lies in its masses of precise detail which continuously destroy overready generalization."[83]

History, through nothing more than accuracy, particularity and an aversion to credulousness, challenged the comfortable Tudor world order. G. R. Elton in a much more comprehensive discussion of the relationship between historical writing and society, claimed that there will always be a conflict because men live according to comfortable legends. Security is generally more important than truth. Art, itself, can augment and support the creation of thosemyths which make men feel at home in their world. But the historian must be faulted who contorts the truth in order to accommodate the weak. Worse yet are those sophists and pseudo-historians who deny the truths of analytic and sceptical history.[84] No statement could be more to the point for my purposes. It is a belief which is central to Bacon's thought. He is brilliant on the point. The new learning is difficult. "It does not lie in the way. It cannot be caught up in passage. It does not flatter the understanding by conformity with preconceived notions. Nor will it come down to the apprehension of the vulgar except by its utility and effects."[85] It is not quite a matter of intellectual bullies pouncing upon the received ideas of the sixteenth century because they had exposed them (to their own satisfaction) as mere compensation for insecurity. Nevertheless, the appearance of skeptical history confronted, inevitably, the whole milieu which Wilbur Sanders summarizes as the "'orthodox protestant conception' of Providence in Shakespeare's age" which was so universally espoused.

Such a body of belief Sanders describes as the "intellectual dishonesty that is born of a fear of complexity. It lives in emotional bondage to those simplifying conceptions which promise to make the world a less awesome place to live in, and man's responsibility a little less terrifying.[86] There is, of course, no reason for smugness on the part of modern writers. The timelessness of these political historians stands valid because of the fact that men of all times create myths of comfort. Here was a more pervasive barrier to be overcome by any work in the new historiographical tradition and reason for frequent misunderstanding or condemnation.

Finally the revolution in content and methods entailed a revolution in style as well. According to Herschel Baker "most English historians were, if not afraid of style, at any rate suspicious of its charms as hostile to instruction."[87] Bodin was ahead of his times in remarking the break between history and rhetoric. It was clear that history, properly written, was not a form of persuasion designed to control actions in some moral or partisan cause. Historical writing had to associate itself with theories of politics rather than with oratory. This also meant a sharp falling-off in history's ability to give pleasure. "I have made up my mind, that it is practically an impossibility for the man who writes to give pleasure, to impart the truth of the matters also - a thing which Thucydides, Plutarch, and Diodorus criticized in Herodotus. I wonder why Cicero called him the father of history, when all antiquity accuses him of falsehood."[88] Bodin recognized boredom as one of the unavoidable side-effects of proper history. It could not be helped. Men who went on searching for style and rhetoric were "stupid". They should be seeking only accuracy and verity. Sejanus, insofar as it was history, no matter

how bent upon "relating great historical events in the livliest and most interesting manner," was contained by the range and style necessary to politic history. Such an account is merely an explanation rather than an excuse. Yet there have been readers such as Coleridge who have recognized the play as being of a "particular kind" as described above and that "whole volumes of such plays" would be desirable. "We might as rationally expect the excitement of the Vicar of Wakefield from Goldsmith's History of England as that of Lear, Othello, &c., from the Sejanus or Catiline."[89] Herein lie the innate difficulties of the new historiography in terms of achieving popular interest and approval: it was drably political, it was grounded in a maze of scholarship and detail, it was iconoclastic, it was simply difficult to comprehend and it was stylistically boring. (These points correspond perfectly with objections raised repeatedly against Sejanus.) Popularity and politic history are virtually contradictions in terms.

The new historiography had to be defended from one last persistent line of attack. To analyze policy through history was to instruct the enemies of the state on the best means for confounding legitimate government. It was argued that political history would teach licence and devious-mindedness, creating a nation full of knaves and opportunists. Statements defending candid history and urging confidence in the intelligence and good will of the reader may be traced back to the De utilitate legendae historiae (Basle, 1531). Similar arguments appear in Grynaeus' preface to Lodge's Josephus (1603), and Wilkin's Justin (1606). Scholars had to consider the calculated risks to be taken for the sake of explaining political intrigue. Bacon took the

positive side in The Advancement of Learning;

> " ... as for those particular seducements or indispositions of the mind for policy and government, which learning is pretended to insinuate; if it be granted that any such thing be, it must be remembered withal, that learning ministereth in every of them greater strength of medicine or remedy, than it offereth caurse of indisposition or infirmity."[90]

True wisdom must be based on the nature of things. Men in power must not be ignorant. Only with sound facts gained through comparative study will a man know how to rule or advise well. Such study sharpens the wits for an active life. Policy must be taught out of self defense. "For as the fable goeth of the Basilisk, that if he see you first you die for it, but if you see him first he dieth; so is it with deceits and evil arts; which if they be first espied they leese their life, but if they prevent they endanger. So that we are much beholden to Machiavel and others, that write what men do and not what they ought to do. For it is not possible to join serpentine wisdom with columbine innocency, except men know exactly all the conditions of the serpent; his baseness and going upon his belly, his volubility and lubricity, his envy and sting, and the rest; that is, all forms and natures of evil. For without this, virtue lieth open and unfenced."[91] Yet every work of political history including Jonson's Sejanus was subject to such accusations and on the other side, Jonson's own Epigram XCII points out the undesirable effects the reading of Tacitus and contemporary political scandel sheets had upon the street corner politician.

## VI

A further explanation for the new historiography and the systematic efforts of such writers as Stow, Camden and Bacon is the influence of the new methods in the natural sciences. Camden discredited the accounts of the legendary Brut and worked as a physical scientist would work from topographical and written data.[92] Stow worked in much the same way in his history of London. Bacon was, more than any of his contemporaries, concerned with making history into a science. It was his aim to study the variables of power and its manifestations in order to arrive at a knowledge of its principles. He believed in comparative analysis of governments and was willing to deal with them statistically. In the Novum Organum Bacon states plainly that the methods used in dealing with the natural sciences should be applied to the study of history. For matters of politics, laws of assessment should be constructed.[93] The difficulty, of course, is in the nature of the subject itself.[94] Such ingredients as national character, strategy, spiritual ideals, nationalism, religion, the spirit of the law do not lend themselves to statistical analysis. The material itself is so full of matter that it is the most difficult to reduce to axioms (De Augmentis V, 32). Yet Bacon believed that a rigorously controlled doctrine of interpretation would offer the necessary precepts for adopting models of scientific enquiry. His goal was to achieve knowledge of the laws of political and social behaviour.[95] This approach had its effect. The search for the "locus" of political behaviour, no matter how difficult, was based upon a consideration only of secondary causes.

Bacon knew that antiquarianism did not lead to the creation of "perfect history" and "that good historians did make some use of axioms, theorems, or ideas of explanation which ordered the facts in a meaningful way."[96] Bacon insisted that the facts had to lead to synthesis, to axioms, but he also insisted, in keeping with his scientific temper, that the facts had to come first. How history became philosophy, Bacon explained to the extent that he explained the inductive method of inquiry.[97] For Bacon this was the beginning of the science of human nature and politics, the "humanities" portion of the Great Instauration.[98] Bacon devoted Aphorisms XI-XIV to the dangers of improper induction. Especially in social history Bacon knew that one set of data need not always produce the same axioms. The exact method of moving from particular to general is not perfectly described. There are many ways of interfering with narrative accounts (including biased preparations of the account even in the most subtle ways). It is the old problem; facts without a controlling hypothesis make no true history, yet history must be grounded, first, upon an unbiased statement of facts. The rejection of "hypothesis" is a weakness in Bacon's proposed system. It was a means of escaping the old theological views of history. But the inductive-like method did lead to new results which I have identified as the new secular political history.

Nevertheless, Bacon believed that well and accurately narrated history spoke for itself and dictated its own axioms. The key statement comes from The Advancement of Learning, Bk. II.

> For knowledge drawn freshly and in our view out of particulars, knoweth the best way to particulars again. And it hath much greater life for practice when the discourse attendeth upon the example, than when the example attendeth upon the discourse. For this is no point of order, as it seemeth at first, but of substance. For when the example is the ground, being set down in an history at large, it is set down with all circumstances, which may sometimes control the discourses thereupon made and sometimes supply it, as a very pattern for action; whereas the examples alleged for the discourse's sake are cited succinctly and without particularity, and carry a servile aspect toward the discourse which they are brought in to make good.[99]

This is Bacon's methodological prescription for avoiding biased history. The exemplum had to be elevated to primary importance. Where copious detail serves to clarify all the conditions of the event the appropriate discourse is simultaneously prepared. There is still a margin for variation, but fundamentally when precepts wait upon experience they are closer to the nature of things. Yet Bacon encountered both political and theoretical difficulties; he refrained from offering any analyses of policy, itself, because he, like Camden, would not dabble in secrets of state (Works, V, 78). Moreover, Bacon recognized one insuperable limitation: the area was too diverse and unpredictable.[100] Nevertheless, Bacon's new process of induction and the idea of empiricism made its mark. Works in this mode were more self-consciously studied pieces of research. A sense of the utility of history without didacticism emerged.[101]

For Bacon history was a form of memory, a form of relating the past. It was the only way of allowing history to escape from the idleness of the imagination and the litigousness of reason.[102] History must have its own integrity. "History of all writings deserveth least taxation, as that which holdeth least of the author, and most of the things themselves."[103] It was a withdrawal of the philosophic historian

so that history could contribute to the deliberations of the philosopher. That history is most useful which is its own "voice" and pleader, is a concept confirmed by Camden. Commentary upon policy flows from the evidence itself by direct quotation, research, paraphrase. The work must be impersonal and devoid of passion. This is the historical writing which contains the most powerful form of political argument. Hobbes asserted that Thucydides avoided that kind of historical writing which commends "the knowledge of the Writer, but not the History it selfe."[104]

As a practising historian Bacon selected the reign of Henry VII because it was the first, in recent history, in which policy, subtle changes, close craft, matters of state, power struggles with secular and religious factions figured more prominently than all other features. He was the first king to become "absolute in sovereignty". Though Henry's reign was a "peacetime" one it was nevertheless threatened by rebellion, foreign wars and "extraordinary kind of confederacies with subjects." England entered a period of international power politics. In choosing his area, Bacon chose an opportunity to write history which revealed political axioms and structures of policy. For Bacon all these affairs along with the intrigues in court and legislation made it the one period "of all former times of this nation [the fittest] to be registered."[105]

## VII

One of the most confused results of the new historiography was the speculation upon the significance of past historical events as patterns for the future. It is a topic too complex to enter into at any length. Yet in the second chapter, Sejanus was described as an action which represented a complete cycle of political manipulation from Sejanus' rise to his replacement by another agent. Moreover, Sejanus' appearance marked the beginning of Rome's decline in a much larger cycle of events which included the gradual change from republican to monarchical forms. In the last chapter I will be concerned with stoicism as a mode of conduct in a society caught by a process of change which lead to corruption and decay. Similar patterns emerge as axiomatic propositions from the historical writings of Jonson's contemporaries. There was much interest in the "plot" of past history as an indication of the future. It was not a new idea, but new innovative permutations appeared with the new historical methods. For medieval men history progressed, essentially, in a straight line from the creation to the last judgement. The incarnation was the center of history. Time was divided into six ages corresponding to the six days of creation, a tradition traceable to St. Augustine.[106] Orosius perpetuated the concept of the four empires, Babylon, Macedon, Carthage and Rome, which all rose and fell, each according to God's plan for rewarding the good and punishing the wicked.[107] The idea of the world's gradual decline was not defunct by the sixteenth century. Bacon's entire philosophy of progress was an effort to demonstrate that the world was not irreparably doomed, that there was no scientific proof of man's increasing moral and

intellectual decay or of a state of decay in nature. The idea of progress defied the hold Providence had had on history. But Jonson was only partially on that side. "I cannot think Nature is so spent, and decay'd that she can bring forth nothing worth her former yeares. She is alwayes the same, like her selfe: And when she collects her strength, is abler still. Men are decay'd, and studies: Shee is not."[108] Jonson speaks only of human decadence in Sejanus. Men's accumulating sins do not spell doom for nature; rather in a strictly causal sense, they spell doom for a society. There is a relationship between moral stability and constitutional and national stability which is a thesis crucial to the play.

> Sabinus. But these our times
> Are not the same, Arruntius.
>
> Arruntius.
>
> Times? The men,
> The men are not the same! 'Tis we are base,
> Poor, and degenerate from th' exalted strain
> Of our great fathers. (I. 85-89).

The idea of progress meant that men were free of the past. They were no longer condemned by nature and their place in history to endure moral corruption. Rather corruption emanated from man himself; political and social decline were the results of individual acts of will and judgement. History was no longer condemned to repeat itself by necessity. That it repeated itself in fact, was a demonstration of human folly.[109] In such a way Jonson turned from a sense of fatedness to satiric attack. His inclination was to interpret all change pessimistically because of facts rather than premonitions or temperament. It was through the complete rejection of the prescribed medieval cyclic views that Jonson could place the onus for political decline expressly upon individual men as political creatures. That history did seem to repeat itself was proof that men were barely

capable of learning by their own mistakes. Upon this foundation Jonson intimates a different concept of the cyclic view of history, one which is also clearly formulated in the work of Samuel Daniel.

Daniel was concerned, not with the cycles of eons but of nations, caused not by prescribed laws of the universe, but by cycles in social behaviour. The cause for change was sensuality which has political rather than personal rammifications.[110] It arises at the height of a state's power and happiness. Decadence and hedonism send the state into decline.

> We shall finde still the same correspondencies to hold in the actions of men: Virtues and Vices the same, though rising and falling, according to the worth or weaknesse of Gouernors: the couses of the ruines, and mutations of States to be alike; and the trayne of affayres carried by precedent, in a course of Succession vnder like colours.[111]

Periods of history are alike, nation after nation, following the courses of their predecessors. Such history falls easily to the hand of the satirist. A preservation of affairs in a fixed state was the apparent ideal for Daniel.

> Ah no, the course of things requireth
> change and alteration euer:
> That same continuance men desireth,
> th' unconstant world yeeldeth neuer.
>
> (Cleopatra, 1215-1218)[112]

Polybius' theory of the cycles of government, rediscovered by such early Renaissance writers as Marsilius of Padua, received a new explication by tracing them to man's fickleness and imperfectibility.[113] Change remains the law of history and men are hardly improved by knowledge of the causes.

> These ancient representments of times past
> Tell us that men haue, doe, and alwayes runne
> The selfe same line of action, and doe cast
> Their course alike, and nothing can be done,
> Whilst they, their ends, and nature are the same:
> But will be wrought upon the selfe same frame.
>
> (Philotas, "To the Prince," 26-31).[114]

Technological advancement is no guarantee of the amelioration of human nature. Such a philosophy does not permit man to defy the gods because of the hopeless doom cast upon him. Yet there is a dire inevitability about the human political situation, all the same. In a world reduced to secondary and efficient causes the only remaining course is one of integrity for the individual and a personal philosophy in some way resembling stoicism which supply the inner resources required to withstand the vicissitudes of the political life. Seneca as a philosopher has a pronounced place in Daniel's works.[115] The revised rendering of the concept of historical cycles is a step in the direction of the sense of the tragic which arises in Jonson's Sejanus, (a problem to be dealt with in the last chapter).

I have only hinted at the directions I mean for this discussion on the historical revolution to take with regard to the play, holding the specific applications till later in this chapter. But I do mean to have suggested in the preceding sections that Sejanus is not just generally related to the new history, but related to it in specific ways, that the play is, itself, political history and thus a part of the reaction against the old order and the earlier historiographical methods, that as history dramatized, it shows how dramatic techniques may be employed in the creation of accurate political history. There is also the need to describe the movement in order to explain the

origins of Jonson's historical and political concerns as reflected in Sejanus, the concentration upon political causation, the autotelic historical narrative and its relation to the inductive method and the idea of scientific historical writing. Likewise, the inherent difficulties in structure, ambiguities of themes, the ease with which such works are misapplied, especially in the late Elizabethan early Stuart context, and the defenses offered by their authors apply to Jonson's efforts as well. Moreover, I am contending that Sejanus contains a new politicalscope ranging from an intense analysis of policy to larger theories on political structure, the balance of power, party politics and a new view of the cyclic patterns of history and the origins of political instability. Characteristic stylistic innovations also appeared with the new history, equally important to a consideration of the play. The next few sections will take up the matter of history as rhetoric, the classical origins of the feigned speech and the concept of the character in political history and, as a bridge to the discussion of the play, an account of the tradition of the historical tragedy before Jonson, together with Jonson's own views on the purposes of the historian and a definition of the history play as a genre of its own.

## VIII

The feigned and interpolated speeches which appeared as part of the stock-in-trade of the new historians had their precedent in classical writers: Thucydides, Livy, Sallust and Tacitus (whose Annals derives much of its dramatic quality from the abundance of speeches and reconstructed dialogue). It was a means of filling in the lacunae of history. Hobbes "argued that thespeeches of Thucydides were

one means of handling problems of causation."[116] Analysis could enter the work without interrupting the narrative, a distinct advantage. "Digressions for instructions cause, and other such open conueyances of Precepts (which is the Philosophers part) he [Thucydides] neuer vseth, as hauing so cleerely set before mens eyes, the wayes and euents, of good and evill counsels, that the Narration it selfe doth secretly instruct the Reader, and more effectually then possibly can be done by Precept."[117] Such speeches made history more vivid, more immediate. The writer working backward from known results created "reasonable" speeches to precede them. He relied for guidance upon other recorded words by that character, upon his own knowledge of the decorum and rhetoric suitable for given occasions and upon probability and an intuitive knowledge of human behaviour. Yet such a technique was, admittedly, a form of historical imagination which contained many of the faults of a more rhetorical approach save that the rhetoric was subdivided amongst the characters. (This was the factor which caused Hayward so much difficulty in defending his history against Coke and Popham in 1601). Camden saw the dangers and refused to write any feigned speeches. Daniel defended the practice of "poetical licence" in speechmaking because history gained much by it. Though a violation of his own principles, "yet, seeing they hold so iust a proportion, with the nature of men, and the course of affayres; they passe as the partes of the Actor (not the Writer) and are receiu'd with great approbation."[118] Justification depended upon the proportion, naturalness and credibility of the speeches. Moreover, the "truth" of such speech writing need not be doubted if the author bases his speeches upon a careful observation of the language and manner even of his

contemporaries, "for, I see, Ambition, Faction, and Affections, speake euer one Language, weare like colours (though in seuerall fashions) feed, and are fed with the same nutriments; and only vary but in time."[119] It is a problem worth consideration since drama is based absolutely upon this technique. Jonson's entire activity as a dramatist-historian had to seek its defense in an argument like Daniel's and to claim the precedent of the ancients in contradistinction to the more empirical limitations Camden had urged. Jonson had Hayward, Bacon, Daniel and Lord Herbert of Cherbury on his side of the issue.

A new method of characterization emerged in keeping with the political purposes of the new history. Fussner believed that of all aspects of style, the Elizabethans equalled their master, Tacitus, in the creation of characters.[120] His were briefly drawn and sharply defined. The curt style lent itself to terse description, each detail justified by the bearing it would have upon that character's effect upon the political scene. It was as public actors that they were to be considered; irrelevant details about private life and affairs did not figure in the portrait. They were not humors characters or types. Yet they were drawn so that the politically operative traits came to stand for the whole man. Again, it is not a matter of excusing but explaining that, for the same reasons such characterization was required for the new history, Jonson required it for his political play. To say that Jonson could not create psychological characters, implying that he should have done so (as so many of his nineteenth century critics have urged), is to miss the point. The more difficult problem is whether a prominent figure, drawn to these specifications, must also be the focal point of the play. The play, as a political action, may also be viewed as the

"significant event" only ostensibly set out as a moral biography. (This problem anticipates the last chapter.) The character in the new history was a man acting by will in a world of human systems and natural causes. It stands to reason that it was a factor which generated a new conceptualization of the political character in Jacobean tragedy and that the emphasis placed upon events complicated the handling of character for the political historian as dramatist.

History had been, traditionally, a part of the study of rhetoric, a branch of literature. Rhetoric was the art of persuasion and history provided the evidence; it was what Bacon meant by the "example" waiting upon the "discourse". The association between rhetoric and history has a long record leading back to the ancients. Tacitus began his career as an orator; rhetoric was a part of his equipment as an historian. But the old debate over which of the two contained the greatest truth and usefulness came into a new phase when history began to develop its own criteria and purposes independently.

It was a commonplace in Italian Renaissance criticism that tragedy should be true and based upon fact, a practice which gave it authority and weight. Yet, as J. A. Bryant Jr. argued, with regard to Scaliger's directives, "it was not truth itself that Scaliger wanted to preserve, but the illusion of truth.... " It was more important that neither the fable nor its representation upset the credulity of the audience.[121] Herschel Baker corroborates the point. There is no indication that the poets who spoke of the need for more historical veracity in historical poems ever thought of turning an essentially literary piece into history "or even thought the terms convertible."[122] This paradox characterized the association of the two disciplines throughout the sixteenth century.

Meanwhile, the standards for "truth of argument" among the new historians came to mean something far more rigorous than a feigned likeness. Truth of poetry and truth of history began to part ways. On the one hand it was believed that tragedy must be founded on history because they bear the same themes. That which is intrinsically tragic as an action is made doubly so if it is also true. On the other, history, itself, lacked moral vigor in the eyes of the poets, and several critics, both English and Italian, hastened the breakdown of the Renaissance ideal of the oneness of the purposes of history and art by praising the advantages of art over history. F. S. Fussner views the division between literature and history as central to the breakdown of the Renaissance outlook.

> In the course of the seventeenth century the rift between the literary and the scholarly traditions widened until, in despair of truth many writers took part in the Pyrrhonist revolt which became part of the 'crisis of the European conscience'. [123]

George Puttenham glided through the issue, favoring art, though commending historical poetry as "of all other next the divine most honourable and worthy" because it is a mode of the "Oratorie craft" which is most persuasive and leads to virtue. Yet he complained that " ... these historical men neuerthelesse vsed not the matter so precisely to wish that al they wrote should be accounted true, for that was not needefull nor expedient to the purpose, namely to be vsed either for example or for pleasure: ... " For this reason he opts for the advantage of fiction over history, "considering that many times it is seene a faigned matter or altogether fabulous, besides that it maketh more mirth than any other, works no lesse good conclusions for example then the most true and veritable."[124]

Because Sidney was a humanist and concerned with the arts which were the most useful in guiding men in the active life, history received a high priority. But poetry, nevertheless, surpassed history because it combined both precept and example. The new history, as it became more bound to facts, fell ever shorter of Sidney's ideals: " ... the historian, wanting the precept, is so tied, not to what should be but to what is, to the particular truths of things and not to the general reason of things, that his example draweth no necessary consequence, and therefore a less fruitful doctrine."[125] For Sidney history lacked the vision of poetry; the historian was a mere hack, "loaden with old mouse-eaten records, authorizing himself (for the most part) upon other histories, whose greatest authorities are built upon the notable foundation of hearsay ... curious for antiquities and inquisitive of novelties ...."[126] Sidney was inviting an improvement in historical research and methods, but a scientific methodology would not have satisfied his basic reservations. When the discipline of history began to establish its own ends in truth to fact, objectives opposite to Sidney's emerged. History became useful in ways unlike literature, in working from events to axioms. The historians began, themselves, to encourage the breech, to eliminate as far as possible, the rhetorical and didactic qualities. For the moralist, the historian was limited as a teacher, chained to fact and verity. For the politic historian, it was the strength of his claim. It was due to this separation of disciplines, in part, that the history play veritably disappeared from Jacobean drama.[127] A survey of The Annals of English Drama shows how the genre dwindled almost to nil after 1603.

In the Italian tradition 'feigning' was regarded as essential to the finest forms of art. Any writer who restricted himself to the truth was not a true poet but a mere historian. Jonson, himself, subscribed to this view and said that it was feigning which made the poet. The poet's art is the "Art of imitation, or faining; expressing the life of a man in fit measure, numbers, and harmony, according to Aristotle: From the word ποιέτν, which signifies to make, or fayne."[128] For Tasso, fact had a stigma attached to it. It was a dilemma for him if the material a poet chose also happened to be true. Such material may be related in the poem only " ... if his narrative is political, and he does not despoil himself of the person of the poet to put on that of the historian, for at times it can happen that one man as poet, another as historian may deal with the same matter, though they will look at it differently, for the historian narrates it as true, the poet imitates it like the truth .... "[129] Tasso agrees with Giraldi Cinthio that the historian is inferior to the poet because, bound to truth, he is "obliged to write of the vices no less than the virtues of men; hence he injures them as much as he benefits them."[130] Castelvetro carries the censure a step further: "Now the matter of poetry should be like the matter of history and resemble it, but it ought not to be the same, for, if it were the same, it would not be like it or resemble it, and if it were not like it or did not resemble it, the poet in dealing with such material would not have laboured at all, and would not have showed keenness of intellect in finding it; ..."[131] Not only is such work less worthy, it is "wicked and deceptive". Castelvetro provides a list of writers whose names should be dropped from the "ranks of the poets ... because they have in their writings dealt with matters already treated by historians."[132]

Illusion of truth based on historical themes and historical truth were in full confrontation even before the rise of the new historiography, but the real challenge did not arise until history made its own demands. Jonson, it would appear, attempted to fulfil all the criteria of tragedy while writing as an historian. The difference was marked in his work by contemporary playwrights who did not approve of the results. John Marston in "To the General Reader" preceding his Sophonisba took a shot at Jonson's manner of handling history. "Know that I have not laboured in this poem to tie myself to relate anything as an historian, but to enlarge everything as a poet. To transcribe authors, quote authorities, and translate Latin prose orations into English blank verse, hath, in this subject, been the least aim of my studies."[133] Dekker in his Lectori on The Whore of Babylon likewise pronounced the difference between art and history: "know, that I write as a Poet, not as an Historian, and that these two doe not liue vnder one law."[134] Dekker insisted that the poet and historian looked with different eyes at the same event and that the results were incompatible. On the other side Bacon took up the cause for history because it was true. In the very same terms as the earlier critics he praised the qualities of poetry, but its feigning was an activity of a different order.

> Because the acts or events of true history have not that magnitude which satisfieth the mind of man, poesy feigneth acts and events greater and more heroical; because true history propoundeth the successes and issues of actions not so agreeable to the merits of virtue and vice, therefore poesy feigns them just in retribution, and more according to revealed providence; because true history representeth actions and events more ordinary and less interchanged, therefore poesy endueth them with more rareness, and more unexpected and alternative variations. So as it appeareth that poesy serveth and conferreth to magnanimity, morality, and to delectation. And therefore it was ever thought to have some participation of divineness, because it doth raise and erect the mind, by submitting the shews of things to the desires of the mind; whereas reason doth buckle and bow the mind unto the nature of things.[135]

Poetry was a form of wish fulfillment, the completion of the ideal by the imagination, but Bacon recognised the value in bowing the mind to the nature of things as well. That is the way to facts inductively discovered. The necessity of following facts was no longer looked upon as the historian's misfortune.

## IX

It is difficult to decide the extent to which Sejanus should be viewed as an effort to reform the drama and correct the flaws of historiography, as they were pointed out by Sidney and Puttenham, through the creation of a work of historical art, or as the preparation of politic[al] history in the form of drama. There is evidence that Jonson believed in the tragic historical poem. In "To the Reader" he asserts that he preserved enough of the formulae for tragedy to make Sejanus a true tragic poem. He appears to have derived his ideas of the tragic poem from the Italian commentators on Aristotle. It may have been Jonson's vision to re-establish in his play the renaissance ideals about the oneness of tragedy and history even though the separation of the disciplines would seem to predoom the effort. Yet, at the same time, it is in political history itself, its themes and issues, that Jonson finds the tragic implications of the political life. Though Jonson defines the poet as a feigner, invention is a fault in the historian. Jonson departs from the Italian critics. The question concerns the reconciliation of truth in art which, for Jonson, had to be the same as truth in history.

Jonson does not abandon the idea that a poetic form can promote and reveal the themes of political history or that political history can, itself, be set out to advantage as art. Nevertheless, the grounds upon which the amalgamation is made are altered. The role of art in Jonson's history can be explained almost entirely in the terms of the historian rather than in the terms of the poet. In Jonson's case the historian's principles are so binding that the techniques of the drama become the handmaiden to his historiography. In this way he, once again, makes history and tragedy convertible terms in contrast to those who never took historical veracity in art seriously. But Bacon, also, contrasted the two studies. There was the more crucial separation of disciplines. Though facts had priority, Jonson had to find a magnitude which satisfied, derive a system of virtues and vices from the events themselves without feigning a just retribution, and entertain even while bowing "the mind unto the nature of things". It is the kind of synthesis which could be held together only by sheer scholarly bravado and technical virtuosity. For Jonson it was not a matter of abandoning art forms to write history but of revising or abandoning the earlier molds so that political history would get a plenary hearing. It meant not re-exploiting any of the present forms of poesy: revenge motifs, morality play structures or De casibus morals, those feignings which were "just in retribution, and more according to revealed providence." Jonson was concerned with defining a new dramatic genre which would accommodate the "ordinary" of political history and show an "order" based upon the political events of "modern" states. It was a matter of innovation in form and design making political history a new form of art; it simply had its own principles of composition.

Aristotle's observation that though a poet should take a theme from actual history "he is not the worse poet for that" remains valid, "for nothing forbids some of the things that actually have happened to be such as are likely to happen; when they are so considered, he who writes of them is a poet."[136] But if the terms are reversed, the relationships show precisely the innovations in attitude toward the historical drama which Jonson offers. If an historian finds an action resembling a poetic one, it is no less historical, since nothing forbids some of the actions treated by poets from also happening in reality. He who writes of them, even in the form of art, is no less an historian for that. The goal of the historian is to make history live in the mind's eye of the reader. To that extent he must be an artist and on that basis the vividness and correctness of dramatic presentation may be justified. The actions and words of men should be veritably brought to life before the beholder. The emphasis should be, not upon physical features, but upon characteristic relationships which reveal the situations of political exchange. The drama then becomes a way of achieving the desire to "carry the mind in writing back into the past, and bring it into sympathy with antiquity .... "[137] Among historians of this kind, Bacon ranked Machiavelli (III. 430) and Tacitus (III. 538) as the finest.[138] It was more likely to be true of those historians who searched into secret causes. So said Montaigne in his Essays (Bk. 3, Chap. VIII).[139] Bacon desired history to go straight to the inner workings of human affairs and to reveal them in detail. Style was the art of exposing intricacies of political causation. "For even as in the business of life a man's disposition and the secret workings of his mind and affections are better discovered when he is in trouble than at other times; so likewise the

secrets of nature reveal themselves more readily under the vexations of art than when they go their own way."[140] Art was the means for quickening the re-creation of the past and carrying it in lively fashion to the reader. Likewise, art aided in the ordering of the intricacies of political causation, in speeches, in character sketches, in grouping of events, in subtlety of detail. Jonson's dramatic techniques, like Tacitus' own dramatic style, serve to illumine the past in this way. Bacon stated that "Dramatic Poesy is as History made visible; for it represents actions as if they were present, whereas History represents them as past."[141] A fair sense of the antiquity of the event is preserved even while an illusion of time present is created. It is essential that time past be preserved since the historical statement must have its own integrity as history. The contemporaneity of history is also important in order to link up the interest which men have in the present and future with the past, not by application but by the automatic process of movement from the familiar to the less familiar. Croce remarked, "and if contemporary history springs directly from life, equally directly from life rises that history which is customarily called non-contemporary, because it is evident that only an interest in this present life can move us to investigate a fact of the past."[142]

Because the historian is concerned with the present, he writes history, even though he writes a history which is faithful only to past records and to itself as a verifiable historical record. R. G. Collingwood believes that such history can be recreated dramatically as an interior play. The historian must animate his material. "Thought can never be mere object. To know someone else's activity of thinking is possible only on the assumption that this same activity can be re-enacted in one's own mind. In that sense, to know

'what someone is thinking' (or 'has thought') involves thinking it for oneself."[143] Yet, the idea of re-creation and rediscovery must be emphasized. Such work makes demands upon the viewer or reader. He must assimilate and judge for himself the significance, the "thought" of what has been re-created. Thus, to enter into the past is to extend the present, and to create it dramatically is to give it the illusion of immediacy. In such a way historical drama may be both history and an imaginative re-creation. The two attitudes must constantly check one another, each searching for their special effects without denying the other.

Jonson's illumination of history through art amounts to a redefinition of the history play which is a genre apart from tragedy, though the two may sometimes be combined. A true history play should be defined as a work which seeks to achieve the purposes of history as they are understood by the historian. It is my thesis that any alteration in the purposes of history as understood by the historian must also be reflected in historical drama. This is to raise the same problems of adaptation in the context of literary genre. Jonson's ideas on historiography appear to have been influenced by the work of his contemporaries. History plays before 1603 drew their materials and historical theories from the Tudor chronicles (which were essentially medieval in character). It was generally the purpose of these writers to support Tudor patriotism, the sanctity of kingship, the great chain of social structure, the necessity of civil peace and non-rebellion and the idea of divine providence in human affairs. These were the goals of history as they were understood in the sixteenth century. Early in the seventeenth century the goals shifted in emphasis following the more "scientific" analysis of political

institutions, balances of power, political bargaining and realpolitik. The history play had no future as such, all matters of truth, feigning and imitation aside, unless it produced the characteristic problems and themes of history. Irving Ribner claimed that the "dramatist who might best have kept the history play alive in the seventeenth century was not William Shakespeare, but Ben Jonson, and it is unfortunate that of his activities in the field of historical drama we have only the evidence of his two Roman Tragedies, Sejanus and Catiline .... "[144] Given the definition above Jonson was virtually the only dramatist who attempted to keep the history play alive, in keeping it up to date with the historical revolution.

Shakespeare's history plays were not only true history plays at the time they were written because they expressed the purposes of sixteenth-century history, but because they were also largely political in interest. Shakespeare was concerned with the rise of a nation.[145] The relationships between characters were political and the effects of their actions were measured upon a society. Alfred Harbage understands this difference in the character of King Richard III. He "is the incarnation of political misrule rather than of moral error, and must perish because he injures England rather than this princeling or that."[146] These same characters may experience private griefs, may grapple with death and immortality, may participate in domestic scenes, but these are secondary matters. Sejanus' death is political. It does not follow from an encounter with blind forces or from divine retribution; he does not embody the fear of death, mutability and waste felt for the tragic hero. Sejanus is no more tragic than Julius Caesar.[147] And Julius Caesar is perhaps Shakespeare's most concentrated political play.

It is a matter of conjecture whether Jonson was much influenced by Julius Caesar. Perhaps envious of that play's success, he made it his goal to write another such political-historical play refining, to an even greater extent, the style and scope of his work in order to offer a purer political and historical statement. That is, however, the narrowest interpretation of Sejanus' genesis. In a larger sense, Julius Caesar reflects a more "modern" view of the purposes of history in keeping with the "tradition" of the Roman play (which revealed a period of history through which men could look at the more ominous aspects of their own state systems). Sejanus, I would contend, belongs to that "school" and brings it to its culmination before the history play dies out of the English theaters altogether.

X

Jonson's "An Epistle to Master John Selden" appeared in 1614 prefixing Selden's Titles of Honour.[148] Through his commendations, Jonson's own standards and goals as an historian are made apparent. Jonson remarked Selden's keen insight into men and manners entailing a close comparison between records of the past and of present practices. Description of the past became a dialogue with the present (33-34). It was impossible to decide which deserved most praise: Selden's relation of events, his "faith in things", the desire to instruct or his painstaking efforts exerted in antiquarian research and gathering of materials (35-38). The outcome of these efforts combined was a statement which challenged fables, exposed impostors, lectured magistrates, corrected errors in scholarship and judgement, offered

reform for the present age, searched for the source and cause of things, concerning itself always with the "beginnings, and decayes" of human affairs (39-46). Contained within were stories which were "weav'd in to instruct." History never lost its didactic goals. It had to prove useful in the creation of a world politically safe and free. Yet truth of more than a philosophical or moral kind was urged - truth based upon research. It was impossible for Jonson to praise one over the other because they were parts of a single achievement. Jonson implied almost as though, given the age, iconoclastic statements, innovations, dangerous criticisms would automatically follow from such historical writing. Jonson saw no discrepancy between factual history, antiquarian research and the didactic properties of history. Side by side he placed the ideals of political history and an enlargment of the narrative in order to delight and instruct. Finally Jonson praised Selden's style which was seasoned, manly, not worked up into "rough" horror or laden with wit and levity. In all ways Selden made the style fit the subject according to Jonson's ideals of decorum. Again the paradoxes are present; "sharpnesse of all Search, wisdome of Choice,/Newnesse of Sense, Antiquity of voyce." - all stand equally in the work, deserving of praise. New, old, researched, edited, the work was properly made. No more succinct summary could be given of the multiple trends in political history. These amount to morethan "truth of argument" though that quality is foremost. These are the stylistic, thematic and didactic qualities of political history which must be in accord.

Courage and refusal to flatter were major temperamental prerequisites.[149] Jonson praised Henry Savile for his possession of

these qualities.[150] Savile was a man who understood the "severall graces/Of historie" and how to amalgamate them (l. 28). It is a matter of decorum, of writing in a style suited to the subject. Jonson then cites the subject of political history. "We need a man, can speake of the intents,/The councells, actions, orders, and events/Of state, and censure them" (ll. 31-33), and above all, such a historian must be willing to write all truth which he discovers. To reveal the mysteries of state was the historians' obligation. The writer was compelled to explain what he knew for the general good and cause of liberty. It is in these two poems, primarily, that Jonson's sense of history and its purposes are conveyed. It would seem logical that these characteristics of history Jonson would have admired in general and would have practised in his own historical writing.[151] General as they are, they support his intentions as historian in Sejanus.

Jonson's complaints against past history would appear to coincide with Bacon's. Because of the state of scholarship any effort to practise a more perfect form must result in a compounding of accuracy and instruction, narrative and analysis. Bacon complained that civil history was,

> beset on all sides with faults; some (and these are the greater part) write only barren and commonplace narratives, a very reproach to history; others hastily and disorderly string together a few particular relations and trifling memoirs; others merely run over the heads of events: others, on the contrary, go into all the minutest particularities, and such as have no relation to the main action; some indulge their imaginations in bold inventions; while others impress on their works the image not so much of their minds as of their passions, ever thinking of their party, but no good witnesses as to facts; some are always inculcating their favourite political doctrines, and idly interrupting the narrative by going out of the way to display them; others are injudiciously prolix in reporting orations and harangues, and even in relating the actions themselves; so that, among all the writings of man, there is nothing rarer than a true and perfect Civil History.[152]

The goals of history implied here may, and I believe should be understood to correspond with those which Jonson cited in the two commendatory poems to Selden and Savile. Proper history remained a matter of decorum, but it was fact rather than rhetoric which directed the writing. History must be more than a skeleton, a catalogue of facts and figures, yet it must not grow prolix in its narration. It must have substance and weight, that is, it must deal with significant materials, the "councells, actions, orders, and events/Of state". These must remain always the focal point and establish the criteria of selection. Irrelevant materials are those which have no causal bearing upon the chosen political event or relation. Through such concentration, history achieves implicit themes which argue for general truths, freedom and tolerance, rather than for partisan causes. Partisanship was a great threat to history. Savile, because he made no bids for political power, was better prepared to write political history. He had no cause thereby to fear posterity.[193] This is a sufficient summary of the historical revolution as it reached Jonson. Bacon states the new mood which had arisen out of a break with the medieval concepts of history which began in the 1580s.

XI

So much of the evidence which could be offered here in demonstration of Jonson's intentions as a "new" historiographer in Sejanus has been stated in other places. To describe the action of the play is to discover Jonson's relentless preoccupation with politics. Jonson's treatment of his sources and his copious marginal references printed in the 1605 Quarto testify to his concern with

facts and accuracy of scholarship. To advance this evidence again would be redundant. The absence of the sixteenth-century cosmology and the obscuring of, or the ambiguous use of, conventional moral structuring is evidence as substantial as any of the "difference" in Jonson's history. More difficult to prove is that Jonson also proceeded "scientifically" in finding axioms which emerge automatically from the relation of events. This whole problem is tied up with Jonson's ability to achieve narrative and commentary, or its equivalent, through drama. Through his skeptical reservations and his determination to pursue the evidence of history to its innate conclusions, he discovered the irreparable breakdown between morality and political ethics on one hand and the irreconcilably contradictory constitutional principles on the other. I would argue that Jonson's inability to arrive at political solutions is the proof, perhaps, the only binding proof, of his participation in the principles and goals of the new historiography. Jonson does not dwell primarily upon the practical lessons Bacon desired for statesmen for purposes of building a more efficient government. (Jonson identifies and exposes political practices through examples, asides, commentary but as often with the intent to satirize and expose as to reveal and catalogue.) The play goes much farther in the direction of axioms about the essence of the political life, discoveries which are characteristically "modern", which suggest cogent penetration to the more basic principles of political causation both in terms of systems and human nature. Shakespeare's Coriolanus is one other play of the period possessing equivalent insights, since it is not only Coriolanus' pride and ambition but the insoluble contest between the Roman aristocracy and the voice of the

plebians which stands as "cause" and "inevitability" in the play. In each case, the whole play serves as an exemplum which demonstrates at the same time, on a political level, principles of constitutional imperfections and on another, man's tragic destiny as a political being. Only by a reservation of judgement which waits on a political analysis of history could Jonson have arrived at the implied conclusions of his play. Otherwise, the exemplum would have waited upon the discourse and therefore have been shaped according to it. The integrity of Jonson's history can not only be demonstrated by his careful scholarship. It can also be measured by the originality and insight of his conclusions in the light of that contemporary political thought which might be called the "new politics".

The difference between a history contrived to reveal an author's private aims and absolutely objective history is not a matter of opposites, nor is it even a useful kind of distinction. It is not at all certain that objective history would be desirable even if it were possible. History without shape and interpretative organization is relatively useless. The historian exists in history. That writer achieves "objectivity" who penetrates most profoundly the interaction between facts and values.[154] Wilbur Sanders states: "There is not interpretative history and factual history. There is only history - which consists in the proper interrelation and interaction between the two."[155] But for the "new" historiographers it did make a difference where they placed themselves in relation to the materials they were dealing with. In order to be on the right side of affairs, interpretation had to follow, in fact emerge from, the literal relation of events. History "scientifically" prepared, revealed its own themes, that is, produced axioms based upon true political relations.

This is, perhaps, to beg the question merely by removing the point at which errors in selectivity and in judgement are committed. But it is the first step in compensating for man's limitations as an observer. Systems are not to be eschewed, but they must be derived from an historical account rather than imposed in advance. Bacon spoke of a new critical history "its insights psychological, the method inductive, [which] must replace conventional moral philosophy in the instauration of learning."[156] Of course, the materials of history can be preprogrammed to certain ends, even subconsciously, but the fact is that new discoveries concerning the nature of policy which were based upon a description of "what is" as opposed to "what ought to be" did arise through the new methodology. These observations depended upon a greater interest in human psychology, in natural causation and in power as the principle of politics. By making a study of political dealings, historians hoped to come to a new understanding of the principles, the axioms of political behaviour, in order to turn it to utilitarian ends in the service of government. "For most of the characteristic thinkers of the Renaissance the cry for the return to the sources was accompanied by the conviction that the sources when recovered would be relevant to present concerns."[157] Bacon's theory of the purposes of history serves for Jonson as well, though Jonson, because of his own brand of skepticism, arrived at conclusions about history peculiarly his own.

Bacon stated that,

> " ... the poets and writers of histories are the best doctors of this knowledge; where we may find painted forth with great life, how affections are kindled and incited; and how pacified and refrained; and how again contained from act and further degree; how they disclose themselves, how they work, how they vary, how they gather and fortify, how they are inwrapped one within another, and how they do fight and encounter one with another, and other the like particularities: amongst the which

> this last is of special use in moral and civil matters; how (I say) to set affection against affection, and to master one by another; ... upon which foundation is erected that excellent use of *praemium* and *poena*, whereby civil states consist; employing the predominant affections of *fear* and *hope*, for the suppressing and bridling the rest. For as in the government of states it is sometimes necessary to bridle one faction with another, so it is in the government within."[158]

Jonson's "objectivity" is a special "made" posture in the play. A close, analytic reading of history revealed themes which Jonson both withheld from the play as history, yet included from the outset in the form of irony. In history as art there is a new economy, a simultaneity of fact and interpretation. Bacon envisioned an analysis of human affections and ambitions which would teach men the best forms of government by which the passions could be controlled. Jonson, no less attentive to the basic urges which move political man, finds it axiomatic that the urges which motivate politically are fixed in human nature and that they will invariably confound man's attempts to curb them either by constitutional leverage or personal example. The world which Bacon studies in search of axioms Jonson embodies as a symbol of itself and thereby comes to insights into the political life which are paradoxical rather than utilitarian, which are matters for contemplation rather than action. Yet Jonson proceeds according to the manner set out above by Bacon. There are the axioms of human nature of which poets are "the best doctors" and of political negotiation which historians are best able to observe in the course of events.

Sejanus feigned love to Livia, wife to Drusus, Tiberius' son and heir. An agent was required to poison Drusus, thus clearing the way for their love and Sejanus' own ascent to the throne. Lygdus,

Drusus' cupbearer was chosen. It was Sejanus' assumption that every man had a price, that Lygdus could be bought either through power or wealth or sexual delights. Lygdus was neither ambitious nor covetous, but he was "wanton, light" (II. 22). "Send him to me, I'll work him" (II. 24), and Sejanus prevailed with him as a matter of course. The period of history, the men and the events Jonson was concerned with abundantly revealed the ominous truth of Sejanus' insights into human motivation. The promise of an office moved Eudemus (I. 351). Others Sejanus could lure to his party because he had offices within his power to sell (I. 181-83). It was this same craving for power which made men obsequious parasites who hung about great men (I. 4-11). Examples of ambition as the foundation for political behavior abound in the play leading up to the portrait of Macro who was all opportunism and no conscience, and to the final scene in the Senate when the senators followed Sejanus with their hails and greetings knowing that "Now he will have power/More to reward than ever" (V. 490-91). It was covetousness which motivated such men as Afer and Varro to prosecute the members of the nobility while it was Sejanus' own ambitions which prompted them to it. Livia, like Lygdus was motivated largely by lust. Her fortune was her beauty which she intended to use "with reverence" (II. 136). Jonson combined this with her longing for power in such a way that the two are fused into a single mood. Sejanus wooed her by promising that the "scarce seen" Tiberius would borrow "all/His little light from us, whose folded arms/Shall make one perfect orb (II. 43-45). Mutual political power was to be gained in their embrace; yet, by her present political advantages she was able to bestow that embrace. Macro, by an act of equivalent unnaturalness, gave his wife to Caligula as a mistress in return for support. Caligula, too, like

Tiberius himself, was a wanton man who had power to sell in exchange for pleasure (IV. 514-523). Here was the first level of factors concerning political motivation, the primary study in causation leading to axiomatic knowledge about politics.

To this list of motives which prefigure political transactions must be added the motives of private passion, revenge, envy and a quest for immortality. These are more difficult to treat in a moral sense because they belong as much to the noble as to the base. Sejanus made Drusus' slap grounds for a personal revenge which he employed as a rationalization for his "practice" (I. 576-581). On the other side Agrippina swore that she must have vengeance for the death of her husband and the oppression of her family and party (IV. 2-7). Her patience was a form of stoic and noble endurance. Sejanus' patience was a matter of policy. Tiberius' envy of the reputation of his forebears was a basic motive behind his treatment of the Senate and his hatred for Cordus. It is the historian who exposes the ill and perpetuates the memory of the good (II. 312-317; III. 455-460). The explanation for Tiberius' anger was that in overshadowing his reputation with praise of his ancestors, Cordus taxed the present state of Rome, and that, moreover, this was done for politically ulterior motives - the restoration of the republic. Finally it was a desire for immortality which motivated Tiberius as it did Cordus (I. 499-502; III. 460). Only their means for seeking it were different. Sejanus, likewise, had statues erected in his honor throughout the city (V. 768-776). Such envy of others and the great drive for a lasting name can motivate in less obvious but no less devastating ways. Tiberius labored in the shadow of Augustus and the achievement of the Pax Romana. He could not accept the fact that Augustus' fame could not be duplicated.

By policy he attempted to achieve what he could not achieve openly. Deeper motives existed behind the surface ones.

Jonson did not overlook one final category: fear. It was fear of Agrippina and fear of the Senate which made Tiberius angry (II. 165-167). Macro entered in the fourth act, unexpectedly, to unburden his mind on the dangers to himself which Sejanus' return to Tiberius' favor would hold. Since he had begun an action against Sejanus it was necessary that he finish it quickly or risk losing all. It was a matter of taking the advantage while he had it (IV. 89-92), which he pronounced in words echoing Sejanus' own to Tiberius: "Stay till they strike at Caesar. Then their crime/Will be enough, but late, and out of time/For him to punish" (II. 202-204). Sejanus advised Tiberius, "Whom hatred frights,/Let him not dream on sov'reignty" (II. 174). Here is a doctrine Sejanus himself could believe in. Near the end Macro's appearance in Rome caused Sejanus great apprehension. He began to sense a plot against himself and called up a larger guard. Yet when Macro appeared in person bearing good news Sejanus, through sudden relief and wishful thinking, turned too gullible. Full of new hope he scorned his fear inviting fire to strike him if ever he should be fearful again since, "Who fears, is worthy of calamity" (V. 399). In these and many like instances Jonson revealed the causes of political behaviour in terms of human affections, how they grew and were expressed-obliquely by Tiberius, impulsively by Agrippina, deliberately by Sejanus. Jonson did not look outside of the scope of such political motivations but piled example upon example until the habits of the political mind became clear.

Bacon approved such studies by both poets and historians because between them they possessed special insights into human nature and the skills for research. The findings of such inquiries should form the knowledge-basis for a system of rewards and punishments upon which governments are founded. It is the responsibility of government to advance a system of coercive measures whereby men are controlled through their hopes and fears. Bacon adopted balance of power measures between contending parties as a workable solution. But for Jonson, the analysis of private motive came to more than the facts upon which laws must be based. It came to the vision of a world in which all political actions could be reduced to the level of greed, pride, ambition which, once turned loose, would destroy urbane life. The dark laments accumulate as the play progresses.

> O Jove!
> What will become of us, or of the times,
> When to be high or noble are made crimes?
> When land and treasure are most dangerous faults? IV. 127-130.

The special irony here is that these words are employed by a man in deceit to lure a good worthy man to speak treason and so remove him and confiscate his goods. When it comes to an analysis of political measures such as the balance of powers Jonson is no more optimistic. Jonson discovers a situation where mixed government is only ostensibly present. In Rome one power faction was helpless because decadent, the other tyrannous because corrupt and ambitious. The remaining forces contending for power were not equal. Tiberius held the trump card and used policy for his own ends by raising Macro against Sejanus. "The proof we'll give,/That, while two poisons wrestle, we may live" (III. 653-654). Macro is "less apt for trust" than any one else yet "need doth allow/What choice would not" (III. 650-651). Therefore, Tiberius adopts a policy which Bacon condoned as needful to government, as needful as it was to a man in keeping his passions on an equilibrium.

Jonson is deft in his assessment of policy and in making it emerge from a narration of given historical situations and through dramatic development. He introduces speculations upon policy preceding the actual practices in order to keep the audience informed. Tiberius' letter follows Lepidus' fourth-act predictions. By mingling honours with punishments Tiberius makes the general populace nervous with regard to Sejanus (IV. 423-425). The reason for such delay, such devious measures is that Tiberius needed to keep Sejanus in his service for a period of time sufficient for him to devour the senatorial party. Meanwhile, Sejanus had amassed a formidable entourage of supporters. They were saying of him before the last senate meeting,"Caesar is but the rector of an isle,/He of the empire" (V. 489-490). But the great "staggering rout" Tiberius could still control. And once they were insecure or angry, they were capable of destroying in the same day the man they would have proclaimed their emperor (V. 800-804). Sejanus fell by the same technique of policy which he had earlier taught to Tiberius for purposes of dispatching Agrippina.

> The course must be to let 'em still swell up,
> Riot and surfeit on blind Fortune's cup;
> Give 'em more place, more dignities, more style;
> Call 'em to court, to Senate: in the while,
> Take from their strength some one or twain or more
> Of the main fautors -- it will fright the store -
> And by some by-occasion. Thus, with sleight
> You shall disarm them first, and they, in night
> Of their ambition, not perceive the train,
> Till in the engine they are caught and slain." (II. 260-269).

Tiberius hired Macro to lure Sejanus' guards away while catering to his ego. It worked perfectly. Sejanus went down as a traitor, that catch-all term, just as he had trapped others. There is irony but there is no real justice. The crowds are ever the same "staggering rout". Jonson reveals the psychology of the mob succinctly. After they tear Sejanus apart, they turn dull and stupid, even claim Sejanus is innocent and wish him alive again (V. 883-887). Meanwhile, the

very senators who rallied around Sejanus, swing immediately to Macro's party shouting "Liberty, liberty, liberty! Lead on!/And praise to Macro, that hath saved Rome!" (V. 747-749). For Jonson, history, as he found it, never ceased pointing out its own ironies.

Choice of a period, the assessment of causes, the axioms of history produced not a theory of government but a vision of political man which incorporated systems and reduced all to intrigue and lawlessness.

Agrippina experienced a world where,

> No innocence is safe,
> When power contests. Nor can they trespass more,
> Whose only being was all crime before. (IV. 40-42).

Bacon speaks of a system of rewards and punishments but such systems in existence do not necessarily mean justice. Silius asked rhetorically whether the Senate thought he was unaware that "This boast of law, and law, is but a form,/A net of Vulcan's filing, a mere engine/To take that life by a pretext of justice/Which you pursue in malice?" (III. 244-247). The suggestion was made early that some form of protest be mounted (I. 425-429), but no course lay open which did not entail death. It is then that the concept of fortune applies, not as cause, but as a metaphor for the uncertainty which comes from the "whirl of men's affections" (V. 702-704). A certain irrationality broods over all which Jonson has explained in causal terms both personal and political. Apicata, bereft of her innocent children, intones the final gloom, not that Sejanus had been slain, but that Livia, Lygdus, Eudemus and the rest of the parasites and informers lived to seek new advantageous connections (V. 873-875). Macro survived to be the "prodigy" of the next age, the same who gave the young girl to the hangman to be raped before she was slain (V. 851-854). The imagery of that final narration is of deformity and chaos. Yet Jonson does not play upon

emotions which thrill and forget. The presence of evil is calculated for the mind to grasp.

## XII

Jonson's analysis of political history was carried out at the constitutional level as well. Two important principles familiar to sixteenth-century political writers form the constitutional frame of reference in the play. To give all power to the monarch without any checks and balances is to invite a tyrant to rule. No man with absolute power will remain uncorrupted by it. In wartime, according to Sir Thomas Smith, it may be necessary to grant such unlimited authority but, "in time of peace, the same is verie daungerous, aswell to him that doth use it, and much more to the people upon whom it is used: whereof the cause is the frailtie of mans nature, which (as Plato saith) cannot abide or beare long that absolute and uncontrowled authoritie, without swelling into too much pride and insolencie".[159] Elizabethans were not unaware of the dangers of tyranny and knew, too, that kings had more power to ravage their own countries than any other threat. "They have the name of authority, the shadow of laws, the pens and tongues of infinite at their commandement. They may print or publish what they like, suppress what they list."[160] Moreover, it was understood that there was a causal connection between the public performance and the private life of a monarch. "One thing only is impossible, and that is, to dissociate the reactions of the sovereign's private life from that of his subjects, or fail to recognize the influence exercised thereby on English history."[161] Tyranny was ever a threat where no efficient powers held the ruler in check. Silius knew that it was tyrannous consent which allowed his farcical trial

to proceed (III. 230-232). A tyrannous exercise of power had stripped the Senate of its legal functions. Tiberius had no hindrances to his attack upon the leading families of Rome whom he envied, and nothing to prevent him from leaving Rome in the hands of an upstart while he pursued his lusts at Caprae (IV. 403-409). A tyrant meant oppression and disaster for the entire state and such tyranny was possible because men who once held power - the gentry, consuls, praetors and senators - found it easier to capitulate before Tiberius' requests, flatter and turn servile than to resist (I. 42-53). These were the men "that within these fourscore years were born/Free, equal lords of the triumphèd world,/And knew no masters but affections;" (I. 59-61).

The second principle was equally binding upon the political consciousness. It was the duty of all subjects to obey their princes and magistrates even if they were tyrants. "Let every soul submit himself unto the authority of the higher powers. There is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God."[162] From a more political point of view it was argued that a tyrant was better than mob rule. A king in any form was better than no king. Political leaders and divines inveighed incessantly against rebellion. Archbishop Whitgift preached such a sermon at St. Pauls on Nov. the 17, 1583, "Being the Anniversary Day of Queen Elizabeth's Coming to the Crown," in which he taught "that obedience is of necessity; and that all Christians ought to obey."[163] Admonitions like this one can be found in tracts and treatises throughout the Tudor period. Under no circumstances could action be taken against a king. To topple him was to invite mob rule or a worse tyrant in his place. Sabinus

demonstrated his loyalty when Latiaris the spy baited him with suggestions of rebellion.

> 'Twere better stay
> In lasting darkness and despair of day.
> No ill should force the subject undertake
> Against the sovereign, more than hell should make
> The gods do wrong. A good man should and must
> Sit rather down with loss than rise unjust. (IV. 161-166)

Arruntius hoped that Tiberius would remain in office even though he had "foregone/The dignity and power" (I. 244-246), rather than that Sejanus should come to rule. The Tudors had no acceptable constitutional remedies for this conflict in interests and political doctrines. The same conflict can be found in all theories of mixed government (including the Roman dyarchy). Where citizens are placed at the mercy of the _princeps_, his will becomes their fate. Jonson does not refute or amend. The conflict is fixed in the play as a fact of history and of political theory. These are the doctrines which men must hold in a perpetual state of contradiction, though their lives and destinies are attached to them. In the condition of the Roman constitution Jonson found both a cause and a symptom of the decline of Roman liberty.

The fault was both in the corruption of the morals of the nobility and in the conditions of the contract the people of Rome had made with their rulers. Jonson established the impasse in the terms of the _pactum subjectionis_, a pact "whereby various social units yielded up their power to a chosen authority."[164] Sir Thomas Smith, speaking of this topic, said that it was the error of the Roman people to "conferre their power and authority unto _Caesar_ wholly."[165] According to the contractualists any fault in the system was due to the shortsightedness of the original contractors. Once powers were given away, human greed could take advantage of the agreement and

abuse the weaker parties. Yet the irrevocable contract had to be defended. The people gave up their rights in exchange for promised protection and the administration of law by "cession or graunt: for so the Romans by the law of royaltie yeelded all their authoritie in government to the Prince ... /Neither is he againe at pleasure to be admitted to that, which once hee did thinke fit to renounce."[166] Yet there were forces which compelled the Romans to this course. "Tacitus reporteth that certaine wise men discoursing of the life of Augustus after his death, affirmed rightly, that ther was no other meane to appease the discordes of the state, but by reducing it under the governement of one."[167] These disorders of state Jonson placed at the core of his exposition. All the citizens of Rome were bound to the conditions of that contract, though its corruption had not been anticipated.

> ... when the Romans first did yield themselves
> To one man's power, they did not mean their lives,
> Their fortunes, and their liberties should be
> His absolute spoil, as purchased by the sword. (IV. 167-170)

Sabinus knew the irrevocable conditions of that contract and submitted to them.

The imperfections of the Roman constitution were of great importance to the Jonsonian draft of the Roman political world, imperfections endemic to all constitutional or ostensibly constitutional monarchies. "here men find themselves committed to constitutional courses upon which they must stake their lives and reputations, systems themselves become the inevitabilities upon which tragic plots may be based. Here was an example of history providing a crisis incapable of being reduced to axioms for purposes of adjusting the laws of reward and punishment. In short, Jonson saw in the habitual practices of greed and ambition, combined with constitutional imbalances, the substance not

only of political analysis but of a tragic vision. The important factor is that Jonson proceeded to his view of the central constitutional conflict through the methods of historical research. Bacon's methods pertain to Jonson's conceptualization of the historical narrative. As a poet he dealt with those compound human energies which determine political action. As an historian he structured his plot in such a way that political conflict was revealed in the context of constitutional principles. The satiric effect of political history is dependent upon the fact that the social and political principles which govern man contain ironic dimensions. Secondly, the effect depends upon a standard of judgement outside the logic of the events themselves by which the action can be assessed. When Sejanus urges, for ulterior motives, that the "State is enough to make th' act just, them guilty" (II. 173), we are chilled by so brutal a form of logic. Yet reconsideration is required when, for the good of the commonwealth, Sejanus' demise is determined by the same principle. The differences between satiric ridicule and legitimate reasons of state logic are not always easy to determine.

It is not impossible to back up from this play and read Tiberius' actions and decisions with regard to Agrippina, Sejanus, Macro as shrewd, precalculated tactics necessitated by a concern for his own safety and the good of the state. Injustices done to such as Silius are a matter of misfortunate waste. When Tiberius says,

> Princes have still their grounds reared with themselves,
> Above the poor law flats of common men,
> And who will search the reasons of their acts
> Must stand on equal bases. (I. 537-541)

he is within his rights as ruler. Such a principle was a Tudor commonplace. God placed kings in the seat of rule, "And in that place he hath sat prīces, whō as representours of his image unto men,

he would haue to be reputed in the suprem & most high roume, & to excel among al other humane creatures ... and that the same princes reigne by his authoritie."[168] Yet no statement is absolute. Even this doctrine depends upon a context, for where a ruler is but merely "lip-good" he then may employ the soundest truths in the most hypocritical manner. This discrepancy gives rise to satiric response. After this statement by Tiberius, Arruntius could not keep his peace; only his friends held him back. Thus, the most literal statements of humility and service are at the same time the most deliberate forms of policy (at best) or hypocrisy.

> Tiberius. Return the lords this voice: we are their creature,
> And it is fit a good and honest prince,
> Whom they, out of their bounty, have instructed
> With so dilate and absolute a power,
> Should owe the office of it to their service,
> And good of all and every citizen. (I. 439-444)

This is Jonson's subtlest form of satire. Tiberius mentions that very contract by which he had been granted absolute power, reminding the Senate that he meant to employ it to their benefit. It is a model display of cunning, masquerading in the form of a reaffirmation of constitutional order. Silius has already warned, "If this man/Had but a mind allied unto his words,/How blest a fate were it to us, and Rome!" (I. 400-402). Satire is the result of this perspective.

The theory in defense of the satiric in "objective" history is the same as the theory which explains how axioms emerge from fact. Things extreme, things deceitful, things cruel expose themselves automatically. It is in the writer's interest to enhance, as he can, those inherent implications after the fact. So often for Jonson it was a matter of emphasizing the apparent gaps between statement and deed, between constitutional description and actuality. Una Ellis-Fermor remarked that in The Prince "there are passages ... set forth in all good faith, that read like Swift at the height of his irony;

there is something shocking in the power, the calmness and the unapologetic simplicity of their setting-forth".[169] Machiavelli did not intend this ambivalent reading, but in Sejanus the accurate historiography was a controlled factor which Jonson used for his purposes as an artist. This same deliberate factual "setting forth" of the new historiography was the most suitable method for Jonson's satiric purposes. Yet the satiric method was also a technique whereby the purposes of political history could be revealed. The relationship is complex. In Jonson's case, "truth of argument" meant not only mechanical accuracy in the reporting of facts, but good judgement in reporting the innate axioms to be drawn from facts. Satire was both a means of indicating the many ways in which men do not join their deeds to their words and a form of implied judgement based upon a vision of perfection which the imperfections of the revealed political world suggest. This was a significant cementing of the concerns and techniques of the two disciplines.

Moreover, where Jonson found satire he also found a tragic vision and for the same reasons. Bacon, following Bodin, argued for the utility of political history.[170] Montaigne commended Tacitus because his work was a "nursery of ethical and political dissertations, for the benefit and improvement of those who hold a place in the management of the world."[171] Jonson would not deny this goal for history, but the artist in him saw a dimension of the tragic because of the non-meliorable aspects of the political existence both in terms of human nature and in terms of systems, truths as empirically verifiable as any other in terms of historical evidence. An "essay" on the inevitable imperfectibility of political man is inherent in the structure of the play. Jonson's Rome was essentially the same as Tacitus': the grand state which had been plunged into a power struggle

and witch hunt from which it would never recover. Sejanus' struggle for the throne was cast against a decadent society whose "epic" decline was causally linked with Sejanus' predatory manoeuvres. A self-contained account, it yet pointed to all similarly guilty ages. It was not Rome in the clutches of fate or providence but in the clutches of its own moral excesses. All the individual acts of greed and treachery culminated in a tableau of national deterioration. It was, therefore, natural for Terentius to conclude from all that had happened:

> O you whose minds are good,
> And have not forced all mankind from your breasts,
> That yet have so much stock of virtue left
> To pity guilty states, when they are wretched;
> Lend your soft ears to hear, and eyes to weep
> Deeds done by men, beyond the acts of furies. V. 753-758.

To include with political analysis tragic lament, and to make the whole state the object of that reflection is not out of keeping with the purposes of history as they were conceived by the Romans. Tacitus I have discussed at length for his gloom, his tragic propensities. For him, politics and misfortune go together. By definition as a political being, man is destined for conflict and struggle. It is in the nature of power itself to lead to corruption. "One learns from Tacitus how to conduct oneself under a tyranny. The only way to transcend the historical situation is to try to understand how it has come to be."[172]

The study of history is a study of causes and in understanding comes the possibility of transcendence. But here the thinker must choose between practical courses, a political meliorism in the manner of Bacon or a pessimistic philosophical retreat in the manner of Tacitus. Thus, another of the potential lessons taught by history must be patience. Jonson cannot suggest that policy should be beaten by policy. In certain situations it is neither honorable nor to any

avail. In Agrippina's case political frustration prefigures the tragic.

> Or shall we do some action like offense,
> To mock their studies, that would make us faulty,
> And frustrate practice by preventing it?
> The danger's like, for what they can contrive
> They will make good. (IV. 36-40)

Or again when Arruntius asks Lepidus by what arts he had avoided persecution, he replies,

> Arts, Arruntius?
> None but the plain and passive fortitude
> To suffer and be silent; (IV. 293-295)

Because fortune still plays her part in history no matter how carefully studied, men must seek refuge through integrity and patience. Even Montaigne believed that fortune was a binding principle.[173] In Guicciardini there is an "atmosphere of resignation".[174] Fortune is no causal agent, but she remains an apt metaphor for what transpires in a world of policy and deceit. Polybius states the two attitudes toward the political life side by side and does not seek to choose one above the other. History is the best area of study for practical affairs "since there is no more ready corrective of conduct than knowledge of the past." Yet the "only method of learning how to bear bravely the vicissitudes of fortune, is to recall the calamities of others."[175] The one is a statement leading to reforms, the other to endurance.

Because history possessed these dual purposes Jonson remained within the sphere of "practical" political history even in going beyond utilitarian aims to history as contemplation and consolation. It was not in his interests to deny the validity of practical meliorism. But where forces came to a deadlock the "poet" began to see and formulate the ironies. It is at this juncture that the patterns of history and of art begin to overlap. It is the same skepticism which makes a man a good historian that also prevents him from accepting too readily, optimistic visions of progress and the meliorability of man.

Not many writers formulated theories of history which encompassed this sense of the tragic in political systems, but there were contemporary writers who provided descriptions of the violation of human liberties because of injustices built into the political structure. (It is at this range of concern that the play can be most readily felt as a political statement; it is also a response which can bring the writer into the greatest trouble. What is generally lamented in the nature of things, revealed through specific examples, is easily interpreted as a direct attack upon a specific contemporary ill.)

Hooker, the writer who in Book VIII of his Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity found no solutions to the constitutional question, asserted that,

> Almost the only complaint in all men's mouths and not without great cause, is, "There is no justice." The cure of which evil, because all men do even give only in utter despair that ever any remedy can be devised to help a sore so far gone; seeing there is no hope that men will cease to offer it remaineth, that we study with patience how to suffer wrongs and injuries being offered.[176]

Hooker also argued his way back to those insoluble contradictions which, contested or uncontested, meant suffering. Hooker defended Christian consolation as a peace-keeping means where there was no help. Yet he saw patience as a necessity where such political circumstances were the cause. Other sixteenth-century writers could represent the conditions of their own times in terms identical to Arruntius.'

> May I think,
> And not be racked? What danger is't to dream,
> Talk in one's sleep, or cough? Who knows the law?
> May I shake my head without a comment? Say
> It rains, or it holds up, and not be thrown
> Upon the Gemonies? (IV. 304-309)

Bishop Poynet employed similar rhetorical figures to express his plight as a man of religious convictions not tolerated in England.

> If a man kepe his house, and meddle in nothing,
> than shall it be sayed, that he fretteth at the state.
> If he come abrode and speake to any other,/further with it
> is taken for a iuste conspicacie (sic). If he saye nothing,
> and shewe a mery countenaunce, it is a token, that he despiceth
> the gouernement. If he loke sorowfully, than he lamenteth
> the state of his countreye, how many so euer befor any cause
> committed to prison, are not only asked, but be racked also to
> shewe whether he be pryuie to their doinges. If he departe,
> bicause he wold lyue quietly, than is he proclaimed an open
> enemye. To be shorte, ther is no doing, no gesture, no
> behaueour, no place can preserue or defende innocency against
> suche a gouernours crueltie .... [177]

All further identifications, all further aspects of history as allegory, the politic[al] historian is compelled to deny. He does not need to aim his history. It speaks for itself and speaks of political oppression, loss of freedom, the threats of monarchy, the very necessity of denying oneself as a thinking, intelligent individual as a measure of self-preservation. Jonson deals with civil liberties as a general issue seeing both the necessity for rage and silence, seeing it in the terms of an historical situation in an advanced state. Latiaris, the bounty-hunter, states the issue most succinctly while baiting Sabinus to his death. To try for true liberty is treason of the first order. Jonson never tired of the irony.

> Latiaris. Methinks the genius of the Roman race
> Should not be so extinct, but that bright flame
> Of liberty might be revived again -
> Which no good man but with his life should lose -
> And we not sit like spent and patient fools,
> Still puffing in the dark at one poor coal,
> Held on by hope, till the last spark is out. (IV. 142-48)

Here is the eternal question because Jonson saw in these words a noble course and the rhetoric of rebellion. Jonson sought no platforms; the play is, in its careful structuring, rather, a work of poise, context and qualification which reveals the tragedy of helplessness through a necessary reservation of judgement.

## XIII

There is yet one further dimension which goes beyond either satiric diatribe or tragic experience. The play offers not only the tragedy of a state but a more pervasive recognition that the idea of state is the first cause in all political activity. This is the primary axiomatic principle of the life of "modern" nations. It is a concept inherent in the new history and its interests. Again Machiavelli was the Renaissance formulator of the idea. It was understood that states have their own courses and principles of development and that it was the duty of every governor and citizen to serve the interests of that state. A free life for a state meant that it must follow the dictates of its own raison d'état. Jonson's themes, both in his satiric and tragic elements, would appear to be traiditional defenses of the ethics, law, and justice without which a state cannot offer a civilized and urbane existence. But raison d'état also implies that the state which is an impersonal entelechy, a higher good than any of its parts, must sometimes overrule moral scruples in men and rulers for the sake of preserving the power necessary for its own preservation. The separation between the ethics of personal behaviour and of the state became a central issue in renaissance political theory. Friedrich Meinecke has called the two principles, "Kratos" and "Ethos" and has found both present in and essential to the life of all complex states. It was the duty of the historian not to reduce the problematical aspects involved, but to describe the preponderance of one principle over the other in every society under consideration.[178] The idea of state produced an

awareness that "what is good in the world of politics is entirely unrelated to and generally the opposite of what makes for goodness in the moral life".[179]

The moralist could point out that raison d'état was merely a guise under which ambitious men sought power, an idea suited only to exploitation by the corrupt. This was the substance of the complaint against Machiavelli by Gentillet.[180] It was the political science of Florence which was blamed for the brutal tactics of Catherine d'Medici of France and the St. Bartholomew Day Massacre of 1572. Rule for the sake of preserving the powers of the state as an unchecked principle appeared intolerable. "Because men are by nature ever subject to temptation, power itself becomes a risk and a curse. But from an equally basic point of view, the evil is not fixed in men alone but in the state system itself. It is the eternal paradox that "the State must do evil. Certainly, moral feeling has rebelled against this anomaly time and time again - but without any historical consequence. It is the most frightful and staggering fact of world history, that there is no hope of making radically moral the human community itself which encloses and comprehends all other communities.... "[181]

Jonson's play seems to waver between these two points of view. Jonson recognized the incontrovertible fact of state causes and conceived of his duty, as an historian, to preserve that truth without pursuing false resolutions, without reconstructing the world in a more ideal state. Historical reconstruction was a form of pure contemplation, its morality guaranteed not by its censure but by its accuracy. Beyond tragedy and satire there was the political historian in control of the recognition that the idea of state as

primary cause thrusts ideological impasse, corruption, into the life of state. Meinecke claimed that historical writing which takes raison d'état into consideration can have no intended morals, but that if such a history is achieved without didacticism "there will be no lack of resulting effects of a moral kind."[182]

Jonson, as an historian, left this issue in a suspended state within the play as the basic axiom of the political life. On one side it was believed that the man who had mastered himself and Christian morality would make the greatest prince. Arruntius stated that Tiberius' debaucheries made him "An emp'ror only in his lusts" (IV. 376). On the other it was believed that the man who had gained complete control over his moral scruples in order to better defend the state would make the better prince. When Sejanus asked Tiberius, "Do policy and state forbid it?" he answered "No" (II. 171), though it meant the murder or exile of relatives; Jonson revealed how essential that contest was to Roman political life and to the study of all political history. That state is happiest where the will to power for the ruling magistrates coincides with the interests of the state. The difficulty of distinguishing just from ambitious motives in the context of the state is one of Jonson's principal concerns.

The remarkable achievement in Jonson's play is that reasons of state are not automatically identified with the ambitions of corrupt men. The state is recognized as the given principle of government, as a legitimate cause surmounting all other rival definitions of society. This premise leads to those ambiguities from which both political analysis and dramatic conflict are drawn.[183] The power drive may be for the good of the greatest number yet may, in the process, deprive a significant portion of the population of their

freedoms. The very men who are oppressed will be guided in their actions by an equivalent sense of duty to the state, that greater good replacing religious objectives through which men hope to gain immortality. The concepts of good and evil accrue but in a new scheme of values which are at all times relative to the ever changing condition of the state. Jonson reveals how those values shift with each new circumstance, where at one point Arruntius must call Tiberius a "monster" because he is "forfeited to vice" (IV. 375), yet at another must praise him for his deceptiveness; "I thank him, there I looked for 't. A good fox!" (V. 586). Fortune becomes the "destiny" which raison d'état dictates according to its own principles. Yet, it is a world based upon cause and effect which is mysterious only while wills remain unexpressed or undisclosed. In this context Jonson discovers new "laws" of history, that power blindly exercised will not always destroy itself and that elemental power impulses can be curbed only by greater power or by making those impulses coincide with the best interests of the state. It is the nature of states to exist outside of the realm of pure justice. Power will always corrupt. Yet the alteration of systems will not invariably overcome this difficulty. Thus, statesmen who recognize the principles of state will submit to the maladies of the status quo. The results of this understanding are represented in two ways in the play. There is an inclination toward tragic recognition, but inextricably fused with it is a renewed philosophy of personal conduct resembling stoicism, which is an adjustment to the raison d'état concept of politics.

The difference marked by Jonson's historiography was that he allowed the idea of state as first cause, an idea demonstrable in the

practices of state under Tiberius. State became the idea, the force and the political reality which caused all historical change. All states have in common raison d'état principles and paradoxes in so far as each state seeks its own best good. This is the universal dimension in political history which altered the methods of historiography. It is the universal aspect of Jonson's play, a discovery far more important than an individual application of history or an identification of an Elizabethan Sejanus in the Earl of Essex. "It is the essence and the principal task of the modern Historicism to grasp the individual pattern of historical humanity, but yet at the same time to apprehend its timeless core, the general element in its vital laws, the universal element present in its connections."[184] I have borrowed heavily from Friedrich Meinecke's thesis to illustrate the extent to which Jonson's view of historical events penetrates to the core of political causation in terms of the idea of state. It is this added dimension of understanding which accounts for its political interests, its intentional suspension of judgement, the ethical outlook of the entire work. It provides a theoretical account of the origins of the tragic, satiric and stoic elements rising out of the circumstances of history. Raison d'état is an explanation of the value system pertaining to states which Renaissance thinkers, following Machiavelli, began to recognize as a system apart from conventional ethics and cosmology. Jonson's play is the drama of that new model of reality which reveals the tragic implications inherent in political systems even while remaining a true and "objective" history of first century Rome.

XIV

"All historical writing was understood to be to some extent allegorical, even when the subject was Persia, Rome or ancient Britain, and since the historian's avowed purpose was to instruct his own age, he could not be surprised if people sometimes made identifications that he would have preferred them to avoid".[185] It was the new historiographer's intention to remove himself beyond the range of this kind of attack. Jonson could claim, even for his totally fictive comedies, that he pointed at no individuals in the play, that no "Mirror of Magistrates is meant by the Justice" no "Lady by the Pi gge-woman" or "conceal'd States-man, by the Seller of Mouse-trappes, and so of the rest"in his Bartholomew Fayre.[186] Jonson had to guard against the "politique Picklocke of the Scene" even more so in Sejanus. It was by following a critical, scholarly method that he meant to save himself from "those common torturers that bring all wit to the rack; whose noses are ever like swine spoiling and rooting up the muses' gardens ... " ("To the Readers", ll. 26-28) There was danger in specificity as there was in vagueness. But the careful historian had the integrity of his scholarship as defense against accusations of biting the present age. The techniques of the new historiography introduced virtually unassailable means through which the critic could deal with those political issues which earlier defied treatment.

The major challenge to the playwright was in adopting his medium to the treatment of political history. A. F. Pollard, speaking as an historiographer, claims that it can not be done, or at least that it was not accomplished by the English Renaissance dramatists: "No period of English literature has less to do with

politics than that during which English letters reached their zenith; and no English writer's attitude towards the questions, with which alone political history is concerned, is more obscure or less important than Shakespeare's."[187] Pollard then proceeds to definitions. Authentic history "deals with societies, and includes such matter as constitutional and economic development and the growth of ideas, which cannot be represented on the stage."[188] Moreover, "politics in fact are seldom successful on the stage, because dramatic action must be prompt and individual, while movement of political forces, like the ebb and flow of the ocean, is determined by inert and voiceless masses."[189] Of course, there are men on the other side such as Christopher Morris who contend that political science itself was in such early stages in the Renaissance that poets and essayists were among the leaders who established the political ideals of the age.[190] But Pollard's thesis remains valid. The Tudor Monarchy was so strong that few ever challenged it. There was hardly any acceptable medium for discussing it. Self government and related ideas were alien concepts; "public opinion seems to have been as indifferent to parliamentary questions of privilege and prerogative as it was susceptible to the literary and dramatic impulse of the age."[191] Theories of political and social structure were rare and even less frequently descriptive. Strong patriotic urges held the commonweal by its singular spirit and the dramatists were inclined to exploit that mood and little more. The new historiography had themes of its own by dint of the very techniques it employed. It tended to favor parliamentary and republican systems because it challenged the cosmology upon which monarchy was based and because it possessed the means for assessing tyranny as well as treason. Jonson's rendering of

history concerned itself with constitutional conflicts and the larger cycles of government which were the matters of true political history. Such studies were multi-faceted and had to be studied from as many angles as possible before judgement could be introduced. New analytic and narrative techniques were required merely to approach that body of knowledge.

The difficulties which Jonson overcame in investing his play with the advantages of prose narrative (which may double back upon and interrupt itself for purposes of analysis) display his remarkable inventive skills yet result in proving the truth of Pollard's words that "Politics ... are seldom successful on the stage because dramatic action must be prompt and individual."[192] He is able to suggest the widest range of commentary by having actions related before they happen in the form of speculation, or by announcing the qualities of a character in advance of his appearance. He introduces conversation between half-choric senators on the condition of Rome before the emperors and upon Tiberius' mysterious policy, with a remarkable degree of aptness and cogency. More of the material needed to complete the essay on political activity, he incorporates in the form of Silius' self-defense, Latiaris' baiting of Sabinus, Arruntius' outraged attack upon Tiberius, combining dramatic actions with political content. But there is so much of a narrative nature from such a variety of parties in the form of invective, debate, prediction, nostalgic memory and sheer soliloquy, that true dramatic action is rare: a slap, a poisoning in preparation, the movements of various parties across the stage, a few spying scenes, a secret meeting in a garden, a pair of court trials, a religious spectacle in the fifth act and a final congregation of the Senate. Sejanus is far closer at times to

a "dramatic poem" than Jonson may have intended. Where history is conceived as a progression of events in time, drama is suited to relate such actions. Where is is a "multiple situation forever on the move," drama is less useful. The problem is that analysis "the more it succeeds in accommodating the multiple, has to help itself by ignoring the fact of motion."[193] It is not a problem unique to the dramatic historian but pertains to the writing of all analytic history. "Historical research itself has for a long time been engaged in enlarging the known area of the past, finding new topics, subtler problems, ramifying roads to understanding, all of which have at the very least been complicating the received picture of historical happenings beyond the point where, it seems, they can be incorporated into a proper narrative."[194] The degree of Jonson's success in achieving an analytic history is proportional to its failure as dramatic spectacle. Coleridge, quoted above, could reduce his expectations in order to enjoy these advantages. Few others have been willing to do so.

On the matter of political content Bacon is well aware of the hindrances to the new learning. Advancement has a fitful course ahead of it in the face of conservatism and fixed ideas. "The human understanding is of its own nature prone to suppose the existence of more order and regularity in the world than it finds."[195] But skepticism, which is the precursor to all progress, initiates those inquiries which sometimes dislodge old orders and comfortable doctrines. Men live by "Idols", false gods in the form of commonplaces and national myths which fulfil wishes rather than support facts. For such reasons men are politically gullible and subject to

exploitation. Men are more "moved and excited by affirmatives than by negatives" yet the true student holds both alike, in fact, favours the negative because it is often the more skeptical and critical of the propositions.[196]

The revolution in historiography was based upon a skepticism which left little of the medieval world intact. Henry Thomas Buckle argued that it was only through such an endeavor that despotism and inequality could be rooted out. (To argue that political times and conditions had altered ahead of beliefs and that new political styles played upon the ignorance of those who still lived enveloped by the old order is to say the same thing in another way.) Skepticism was the only guard against tyranny. "In a word, it is this which has remedied the three fundamental errors of the olden time: errors which made the people, in politics too confiding; in science too credulous; in religion too intolerant."[197] This statement corroborates what A. F. Pollard (cited above) said of the Tudors, and it points out the advances in political argument which are suggested by such a work as Sejanus. The play is concerned with the moment in the development of a state when liberty is threatened by extinction (IV. 142-148). It is a work which ignores favoured concepts of rule and order and exposes the inner causes of state which Tudor propagandists had attempted to seal-off as untouchable. Such skepticism "is an abomination to the ignorant; because it disturbs their lazy complacent minds; because it troubles their cherished superstitions; because it imposes on them the fatigue of inquiry."[198] For the play this is merely an explanation, not an excuse. Political history is imbued by skepticism and its range of interests and concentration upon causes entails the "fatigue of inquiry" both for the

writer and the reader. Skeptical historians produced an imitation more closely approximating the actual practices of the political life. The results were so much the more removed from the body of received ideas. It need not necessarily have been Jonson's laborer scholarship which exasperated his first audience and subsequent readers. It could also have been the findings of his history; at the heart of the political life he discovered a vicious and unresolved contest for power which gyrates through endless revolving cycles of history leaving no exits for man as a political being. R. A. Foakes does argue that Jonson's first audience reacted unfavourably to "the revolutionary nature of the play," because it "pursues the logic of its theme to a savage conclusion .... "[199] It is at this point that one becomes aware of the significance of the play as history, for in this regard, it is a slice taken from the decline of a civilization. It matters little that the reader knows what actually does precede or follow Sejanus' adventure.[200] But it is important that the viewer is aware that "something" follows and that the play indicates no prospects of justice or compensation. The conditions which make Sejanus' rise possible remain at the end: fear, flattery, fickleness, lawlessness, the survival of Macro. Both Jonson's skepticism as an historian and his cynicism as an observer of the political life made Sejanus a "revolutionary" work.

With regard to its accessibility in the theater, its qualities of immediate appeal, Sejanus does not allow its audience a complete degree of familiarity. Jonson's antiquarian exactitude and his rhetorical imitations have been cited as grounds for the complaint. Yet there are reasons which may be traced to the purposes of the new historiography. History must be assimilated in order to be understood, yet if it is too easily assimilated it is taken for part of the self

and nothing more. Such history has no liberating qualities; it lacks the surprises and distance which provoke dialogue and reflection. The difficulty with most Elizabeth plays, including the "exotic" Roman plays is that they are too Elizabethan in terms of the conceptualization of ideas and contexts. Sejanus, through the methods of research and archaeological reconstruction, achieves a distance which exercises the mind and forces it to transpose and weigh. T. S. Eliot stated that it is the "lazy readers' fatuity" which has caused the play to be slighted.[201] But this is to place only in a slightly less favourable light what men from Leonard Digges' time to our own have said about the play. Eliot is right, but, of course, audiences have seldom wanted to labour that hard in their studies, much less in the theater.

## XV

Sejanus does not exist in a vacuum. There are plays before it which display a self-conscious interest in politics and the society. Marlowe's Tamburlaine plays are still in the heroic tradition, studies of a dynamic protagonist engaged in conquest. His Edward II is, by comparison, in a new key. The hero cult is deemphasized in favour of the study of intrigue during peace time and the relationship between monarchial power and the community. There is a disillusionment with power and a continual awareness of its corrupting influence. Machiavellian vertu is a less attainable quality. Will-power is insufficient to beat fortune. Men are less genuine, perfect leaders a pointless idealism. Men are too unavoidably shaped by the events and nature of the times. Moreover, while Marlowe deals with political failure in Edward II "he is able to offer no real formula for political

success."[202] It is this lack of belief in the existence of political solutions which becomes the central principle in Sejanus. In Marlowe there is a large degree of skepticism and a use of the dramatic form to set out a total political transaction as well as the life of a single king. But Marlowe's play is one of the few dramatic works in this vein worth mention. The Roman play tradition, as a tradition, is too sketchy and varied to be worth describing for its common properties as political drama. Thomas More's History of Richard III (c. 1513), is a work more to the point. More was inspired by the classics. He used the invented-speech techniques of the ancients. The work is skilfully written, full of controlled ironies, fine character sketches and possesses discreet skepticism concerning political matters. There is that same sense of fatedness in More's overall assessment of political negotiations and their effects upon society which one finds in Jonson. A pointedly factual, yet skilfully ironic style conceals More's direct criticism of government. M. M. Reese describes the work as a "companion piece to Utopia, in being a witty, imaginative, deadly serious condemnation of Renaissance statecraft, an "'anti-Machiavel' written before Machiavelli's name was known."[203] More concentrated as much upon tyranny as upon rebellion. That in itself, is of major significance. Dudley's Tree of Commonwealth (1509-10), was written as a plea for consideration after having been charged with treason. Yet it contains a list of the abuses a non-rebellious people must endure under a tyrant.[204] Dudley hardly dared to level accusations, clear headed as he must have been on matters of despotism. These works were two exceptions. In other earlier works, set narrative patterns intercepted facts and preshaped political thought. Terminology dealing with policy was limited.

Biographical histories invariably emerged as moral exempla illustrating the pride of man and the influence of providence. Chronicles were too diffuse and lacked causal assessment. Political history in literary works awaited a fuller development of the techniques of irony and satire.

Conditions were never right during the early seventeenth century for the development of a tradition of historical tragedy in the manner of Sejanus. Shakespeare's Coriolanus is, in my opinion, Sejanus' worthiest successor. Leicester Bradner said that "Shakespeare's Coriolanus is nearer to Jonson's Sejanus than to his own other Roman plays." Both works deal with political corruption, both are "intensely real" and are intended to discomfort the viewer. Coriolanus is a work in the secular tradition of history and the drama.[205] Webster was interested, to a certain extent, in getting his facts right in The Duchess of Malfi and The White Devil, but, perhaps, Ford's Perkin Warbeck is the only play commonly read which is distinctly in the tradition of Jonson's Roman plays. The source was Bacon's Historie of the reigne of King Henry the Seventh. Ford had to find an event already half plotted and half tragic in the source in order to refrain from falsifying the materials. To the extent that tragedy had to turn upon the idea of fallen greatness and wasted potential, Jonson's choice of a subject was the less happy of the two; Sejanus was too parently wicked. But such a choice also freed Jonson from conventional moral patterns, allowed him to decentralize the hero and concentrate more upon the broader spectrum of political events. Nevertheless, Perkin Warbeck is a political play. The fortunes of the state ride upon the careers of men. Irving Ribner contends that Ford had specific political goals in mind, an exposé of the fallacies of divine right and the abuses of Charles I in particular. The play

"embodies a philosophy of history which is not far removed from that of our own day."[206] Drama as verifiable history existed as an ideal, but the ideal did not inspire many dramatists in the seventeenth century. History became too distinct a discipline of its own which, the more it was refined, the more it differed from the goals of the imaginative artist.

F. Smith Fussner claims that "if the scholarly tradition in historiography failed to maintain contact with literary tradition, it was not because scholars lacked imagination. Rather, it was because there were increasingly difficult, technical problems to be solved, and scholars were turning more and more toward specialised research."[207] It was the result of a greater interest in records, language, philological evidence, chronological accuracy and the classical models, especially the political writers, Polybius, Tacitus and, later, Thucydides. The study of the state grew up with the rise of the secular state. There, emphasis was placed upon political and human causes rather than upon divine purposes and design. Men began to study history in earnest in order to manage contemporary affairs more efficiently. The scientific method had a profound effect upon historiography despite its limitations. Men such as Bacon, fully aware of the surprises and abundance of detail in history, yet sought from the welter, general laws of political behaviour. These historians not only scrutinised facts but themselves, asking about their own limitations as observers, their prejudices, as well as about problems of truth, style, relevance and interpretation. Limits were set on conjecture and the imagination. Biography, economics, and philosophy were consciously entertained as related disciplines

leading to new concepts of organisation. Works based upon themes, short time spans and single political transactions joined with or absorbed biography and replaced the older annalistic method. Moreover, the revolution in historiography was not separate from the social economic and political changes of the period. Jonson found a direct route to a satiric exposure of public vices based on the premise that the study of history is the only basis for the study of politics. That Jonson was writing with the standards of the new historiography in mind is demonstrated both by his scholarship, his use of Tacitus, the absence of earlier historical commonplaces and, above all, by the political implications of the whole which follow from a close assessment of policy and its causes. The play is an experimental work based on the premise that historical drama had no future unless it adapted itself to the purposes of history. The work also proved that those purposes and the new methodology were less tractable and thus less amenable to the drama than Jonson expected. The new trends in historiography made it increasingly difficult for the artist to join the historical with the tragic in a single statement.

## Footnotes

1. See especially F. Smith Fussner, The Historical Revolution: English Historical Writing and Thought 1580-1640 (London, 1962), p. xxii. Others will appear throughout the chapter.

2. Ernest Talbert, The Problem of Order (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1962); A. O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (New York, 1936); Hardin Craig, The Enchanted Glass; The Elizabethan Mind in Literature (Oxford, 1952). E. M. W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture (London, 1948); Theodore Spencer, Shakespeare and the Nature of Man (New York, 1949); Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes (New York, 1949; first publ. 1930).

3. The concept of God directing history was the keynote to medieval historiography. It was the chief way in which God revealed himself to man. Events morally interpreted were proof of his concern. (Of course, the injustices were allowed by God to try the patience of the faithful).

4. Polydorus Vergilius, The Anglica Historia 1485-1537, trans. D. Hay (London, 1950).

5. W. H. Greenleaf, Order, Empiricism and Politics (Oxford, 1964), p. 114.

6. This is the pattern followed by historical plays and poems throughout most of the sixteenth century. See W. H. Greenleaf, p. 101.

7. Sir Thomas Elyot, The Boke Named the Gouernour, ed. Henry Herbert Stephen Croft, 2 vols. (London, 1883).

8. Madeleine Doran gives an account of the De casibus tragedy, its properties and currency in England in the sixteenth century in Endeavors of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama (Madison, Wisconsin, 1964), 116-128. The Mirror for Magistrates, ed. Lily B. Campbell. Boccaccio's De casibus Virorum illustrium was translated by John Lydgate and published in London, 1554 by John Wayland. Lydgate's own The Fall of Princes, commissioned by Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester c. 1431, was finished in 1439, a work in the manner of Boccaccio's De casibus ...

9. "Almost all the literature of Elizabethan England was permeated with traditional concepts ...." "Elizabethan writers still used the argument from analogy in a thoroughly Medieval manner." Henry Bamford Parkes, The Divine Order: Western Culture in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (London, 1970), p. 439.

10. F. J. Levy, Tudor Historical Thought (San Marino, Calif., 1967), pp. 6-7.

11. Order, Empricism and Politics, p. 146.

12. A History of Political Theory (London, 1959), p. 335.

13. History of Civilization in England, 3 vols. (London, 1902), I, 327.

14. Henry Thomas Buckle, I, 329-30.

15. The Historical Revolution: English Historical Writing and Thought 1580-1640 (London, 1962), p. 20.

16. "By the beginning of the fifteenth century, the connection between classical studies and practical - that is, political - life was already being enshrined in the educational theories of the day." F. J. Levy, Tudor Historical Thought (San Marino Calif., 1967), p. 35. The goals of humanism were seldom far removed from pedagogy and from practical training in statesmanship. But the emphasis was almost entirely upon Christian virtue, the qualities of the good man. Political training had not yet become a separate discipline.

17. The humanists had a high regard for the classical writers, though they used them in their own special way with, perhaps, a greater regard for style and rhetoric than for content. "The history of the classical world had been written once and for all by the ancients; the humanist could do no more than add his footnotes." F. J. Levy, Tudor Historical Thought, p. 39. History was important in the schools because it was a pedagogical means for teaching Latin oration. History was still in the service of rhetoric.

18. Hiram Haydn, The Counter-Renaissance (New York, 1950), p. 17.

19. Myron P. Gilmore, "The Renaissance Conception of the Lessons of History," Facets of the Renaissance, ed. William H. Werkmeister (New York, 1963), p. 91.

20. The Cease of Majesty: A Study of Shakespeare's History Plays (London, 1961), p. 10.

21. Beatrice R. Reynolds, "Latin Historiography: A survey 1400-1600." Studies in the Renaissance Vol. II (1955), 7-66.

22. Niccolo Machiavelli's Il Principe was first allowed in print in 1531. The translation by Edward Dacres appeared in 1640 (repr. London, 1929).

23. F. Smith Fussner, p. 263.

24. J. W. Allen, A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century (London, 1941; first pub. 1928), p. 453.

25. Irving Ribner, The English History Play in The Age of Shakespeare (London, 1965; first pub. 1957), p. 17.

26. F. J. Levy, p. 241. Felix Raab takes up the problem at length in his study, The English Face of Machiavelli: A Changing Interpretation 1500-1700 (London, 1964). Sir Walter Raleigh's references to Machiavelli in Maxims of State are somewhat deceptive in disclaiming a man he borrowed much from. Raleigh urged that princes and their tactics be studied, but where the study of "second causes" conflicts with the Augustinian universe Raleigh retreats back to God's will and first principles (p. 73). Thus, Raleigh perfectly "illustrates the tension between the secular and theological approaches to politics and history, and indeed to the world. His writings testify to the fact that this tension was strong, conscious, and entirely unresolved." (p. 73).

27. Sir Thomas Smith describes the founding of a commonweal as a covenant for mutual self protection. De Republica Anglorum (Henrie Middleton, London, 1583), Civ. Richard Hooker understood that man's gregariosness led to community life, then agreements about the conditions of union which led to the establishment of government and law. On the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, The Works, ed. Rev. John Keble, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1888), I. 239. He enlarged this into a theory of government by contract. The people were the source of the king's power which once granted, was irrevocable.

28. Treatises suggesting a limitation of the powers of the monarch were written primarily by recusants, usually in exile. Their theories of government, which included election of kings and broad representation appear advanced on the surface but religious grievances were only barely disguised. Tolerance would not have been their policies had they been in power. Four of the more noteworthy are: William Allen, A True, Sincere and Modest Defense of English Catholics, ed. Robert M. Kingdon (Ithaca, New York, 1965); Thomas Starkey, A Dialogue Between Reginold Pole and Thomas Lupset, ed. Kathleen M. Burton (London, 1948); John Ponet, A Short Treatise of Politike Pouuer (1556); Doleman (Robert Parsons) A Conference About the Next Succession to the Crown of England (1594).

29. Tracts concerning non-rebellion were rife. In 1528 William Tyndale's The Obedience of a Christian Man appeared putting the concept simply. He who resists the monarch resists God. Stephen Gardiner said much the same in his De Vera Obedienta: An Oration (Michael Wood, 1553). The logic of the exhortation was based upon the king's divinely sanctioned place and the principle that rebellion always hurt the people. Robert Crowley in The Way to Wealth, wherein is plainly taught a most present Remedy for Sedicion (London, 1550), repr. E.E.T.S. ed. J. M. Cowper, London 1872, puts the motives in economic terms. The poor sought riches the easy way. Thomas Cranmer, after the rebellion in Cornwall in 1549, preached his A Sermon Concerning the Time of Rebellion attributing such disobedience to a papist plot; ed. Rev. John Edmund Cox, Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer (Cambridge, 1846), pp. 190-202.

30. Peter Wentworth was the parliamentarian most disenchanted by the powers of intimidation which the Queen had over her parliament. He suffered imprisonment in 1576 and again in 1587 for refusing to accept the limited conditions of house debate. He thought parliament little more than a "very school of flattery and dissimulation". G. R. Elton, The Tudor Constitution (Cambridge, 1960) p. 263. Clearly it was part of the constitutional question.

31. This is the central thesis of the work by E. H. Greenleaf, Order, Empiricism and Politics. Empiricism was the scholarly phenomenon which caused the break with "order". By definition to adopt new methods was to adopt a new political position. Monarchy lost its conventional grounds of defense and was forced to redefine itself as the most efficient rule in a world of power politics or become obsolete.

32. Thomas Smith's De Republica Anglorum is a description of the government of England as Smith understood it. He did not attempt to be prescriptive or to reform, but he weighted the idea of mixed government in contrast to French absolutism. The people had powers and rights in parliament which did not deny the absolute power of the king in his realm of authority. Smith could not define, definitively, what those realms of prerogative consisted of and left the conflicts in the constitution to solve themselves through tradition and custom. Smith employed the "king in parliament" doctrine which made both absolute without infringing upon the rights of each (p. 34). But it is a law of government that power tends to shift from one party to the other and so create a state of imbalance. Jonson proved that in the play and the Civil War proved Jonson right. Mixed government was an ideal virtually impossible to preserve in practice.

33. Hooker debates at length in Books III and VIII of On the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity upon the problem of checking the King's powers. He rehearsed all the conventional powers over the king; the law which he administered and God himself. But there were no actual political powers which could touch him without toppling the authority upon which the whole judicial system was founded. Hooker had no answers to the problem of tyranny.

34. H. B. Parkes, p. 439.

35. Aristotle in Bk. V of the Politics talks about the varieties of tyranny (trans, E. Barker, Oxford, 1948; reprinted 1950). Thucydides deals directly with problems of power in the Peloponnesian Wars, trans. F. C. Smith, 4 vols. (London, 1919-23), Bk. V, chap. 85 ff. In Bk. III, chap. ii of De Officiis, Cicero deals with political ethics and rule for the good of the state (trans, W. Miller, London, 1913; reprinted 1961). Tacitus must lead the list, however, a man whose works are perpetually concerned with ideas of state and power.

36. F. Smith Fussner, p. 5.

37. Hiram Haydn, The Counter-Renaissance (New York, 1950), p. 18.

38. Daniel Boughner, The Devil's Disciple: Ben Jonson's Debt to Machiavelli (New York, 1968), p. 90.

39. F. J. Levy, p. 250.

40. Friedrich Meinecke, Machiavellism: The Doctrine, of Raison d'Etat and its Place in Modern History, trans. Douglas Scott (London, 1952), pp. 25-26.

41. F. J. Levy, pp. 48, 253.

42. F. J. Levy, p. 251.

43. F. J. Levy, p. 251. It must be considered whether Jonson intended to use Tacitus in the same way or to defend his reputation as an objective yet political historian in the face of the use he had come to in popular causes. It is for this reason that I have discussed the play as Tacitean apology and commentary. Moreover, that Tacitus was not used by other playwrights in the period may not be due simply to his complexity as a writer and thinker. Tacitus was not a politically neutral figure in Elizabethan England.

44. William Camden, The History of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princess Elizabeth Late Queen of England, (Annales), ed. Wallace T. MacCaffrey (Chicago, 1970), p. xxvi.

45. Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthorndon, ed. R. F. Patterson (London, 1924), p. 29. Robert Cotton was also a student of Camden's at Westminster School. Cotton shared Camden's interests and the two remained close friends till Camden's death. F. Smith Fussner, p. 120.

46. Ben Jonson, The Complete Poetry, ed. William B. Hunter Jr. (New York, 1963), p. 43 (l. 18).

47. Ben Jonson, Works, ed. C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson (Oxford, 1925-1952) VIII (1947), 592.

48. Plutarch, Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans, trans. Sir Thomas North, intro. George Wyndham, 6 vols. (London, 1895), "Amiot to the Readers," p. 12.

49. The State in Shakespeare's Greek and Roman plays (New York, 1940), p. 33.

50 Quotation from The Evolution of British Historiography From Bacon to Namier, ed. J. R. Hale (London, 1967), p. 12.

51. Henry Bamford Parkes, The Divine Order: Western Culture in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (London, 1970), p. 448.

52. "The sombre, analytical spirit of the 'politic' writer pervades all Hayward's historical work. He is always concerned to probe beneath the surface of events, to show how the past illustrates the permanent realities of human nature and politics, and to draw conclusions about them." S. L. Goldberg, "Sir John Hayward, 'Politic' Historian," The Review of English Studies, VI (July, 1955), p. 235.

53. James S. Spedding et al., The Letters and Life of Francis Bacon (London, 1857-74), IX, 14.

54. For further evidence see Baxter Hathaway, The Age of Criticism: The Late Renaissance in Italy (Ithaca, N.Y., 1962), p. 130.

55. J. R. Hale describes the change of laws in the history of the late sixteenth century as a change from "morals to wisdom, and in particular, political wisdom." The Evolution of British Historiography From Bacon to Namier (London, 1967), p. 10.

56. "It has been pointed out that Machiavelli and Tacitus were essentially ambiguous, that they could be read as manuals for tyrants or as explications of the ways of tyrants for those wishing to go into opposition." F. J. Levy, p. 262.

57. J. E. Neale, Essays in Elizabethan History (London, 1958), p. 79.

58. S. L. Goldberg claims that "Bacon and Hayward share the same methods, as well as the same virtues and faults as historians." "Sir John Hayward, 'Politic' Historian," The Review of English Studies, Vol. VI, No. 23 (July, 1955), pp. 235-36.

59. I am unprepared to speculate on whether Jonson was making any pointed references to Hayward's trial in the play. It is inconceivable that Jonson did not know of and take an interest in the proceedings, and the misapplication of Hayward's account must have aroused his apprehension.

60. Leonard F. Dean, "Sir Francis Bacon's Theory of Civil History-Writing," Essential Articles for the Study of Francis Bacon, ed. Brian Vickers (Hamden, Conn. 1968), p. 216. (Reprinted from English Literary History, Vol. 8 (1941), 161-83. Quotation from The State Papers Domestic, Elizabeth ... , Vols. 274-5).

61. See also Margaret Dowling, "Sir John Hayward's Troubles over his Life of Henry IV," The Library, XI (Sept., 1930), 212-24.

62. F. J. Levy, pp. 280-81.

63. F. J. Levy, p. 282. The Annales was written in Latin and translated into English by R. Norton. The first half of the Latin edition appeared in 1615, the first complete English edition in 1630. A modern "selected chapters" edition, ed. Wallace T. MacCaffrey (Chicago, 1970) is the first to appear since 1706.

64. F. Smith Fussner, p. 245.

65. Annales, ed. Wallace T. MacCaffrey, p. 5.

66. For the reputation of the Annales see William Camden, The History of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princess Elizabeth ..., ed. Wallace T. MacCaffrey (Chicago, 1970), p. xi.

67. Samuel Daniel, The Complete Works in Verse and Prose, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, 5 vols. (New York, 1963), II, 6.

68. Samuel Daniel, "The Collection of the History of England," The Complete Works in Verse and Prose (New York, 1963), IV, 76.

69. Samuel Daniel, Works, IV, 83.

70. Works, IV, 77. Daniel's concept of new subject matter is to be compared with Bacon's statement in his Preface to the History of the Reign of Henry VII. The Tudor period was one of peacetime politics, intrigues and bargaining. Camden recognized the difference as well. "For they be not the great wars and conquests (which many times are the works of fortune and fall out in barbarous times) the rehersal whereof maketh the profitable and instructing history; but rather times refined in policies and industries, new and rare variety of accidents and alterations, equal and just encounters of state and state in forces and of prince and prince in sufficiency, that bring upon the stage the best parts for observation." Bacon, VI, 19.

71. Samuel Daniel, Works, IV, 77.

72. Samuel Daniel, Works, IV, 77.

73. Samuel Daniel, Works, IV, 78.

74. "Daniel was too good a historian to be a good historical poet, and he realized that writing philosophical history was itself difficult enough without trying to force narrative and analysis into verse, while those things that made verse interesting - romance for instance - might not be appropriate to philosophical history." F. J. Levy, p. 275.

75. Irving Kibner, The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare (London, 1965; first pub. 1957), p. 8.

76. Rudolf B. Gottfried, "Samuel Daniel's Method of Writing History," Studies in the Renaissance, Vol. III (1956), 157-175 (p. 157).

77. Annales, ed. Wallace T. MacCaffrey, pp. 4-5.

78. F. Smith Fussner, p. 242.

79. Herschel Baker, The Race of Time, Three Lectures in Renaissance Historiography (Toronto, 1967), p. 77. The evolution of the use of records is an important factor in the new historiography. Bacon urged the narrowing of fields of scholarship because universal histories were of no use. Such writers are forced to resort to rumour and hearsay (IV, 305, 309). Bacon would agree with Sidney's complaints against historians in his Apology for Poetry, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (London, 1967), p. 105.

80. Annales, ed. Wallace T. MacCaffrey, p. 6.

81. G. R. Elton, Political History: Principles and Practice (London, 1970), p. 58.

82. Sir Francis Bacon, Works, IV, 48-49.

83. Political History: Principles and Practice, p. 69. Original comments on this subject by Bacon appear in Vol. IV, 297 where he discusses Aristotle's concern with '"smallest portions"' as the foundation for proper historical analysis.

84. G. R. Elton, pp. 91-92.

85. Sir Francis Bacon, Works, IV, 42.

86. The Dramatist and the Received Idea, (Cambridge, 1968), p. 111.

87. Herschel Baker, p. 87.

88. Jean Bodin, Method for the Easy Comprehension of History, trans. Beatrice Reynolds (New York, 1945), p. 55.

89. Samuel T. Coleridge, Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Dramatists, (Edinburgh, 1905), p. 275.

90. Sir Francis Bacon, Works, III, 271.

91. Sir Francis Bacon, "Advancement of Learning," Works, III, 430-31.

92. M. M. Reese, p. 9.

93. Works, IV. 112. "Now what the sciences stand in need of is a form of induction which shall analyze experience and take it to pieces, and by a due process of exclusion and rejection lead to an inevitable conclusion." Works, IV, 25.

94. G. R. Elton in Political History: Principles and Practice discusses this point, p. 135. W. H. Greenleaf also notes it, p. 230.

95. George H. Nadel, "History as Psychology in Francis Bacon's Theory of History," Essential Articles for the Study of Francis Bacon, ed. Brian Vickers (Hamden, Conn., 1968), p. 248. Bacon deals with the problem in The Advancement of Learning.

96. F. S. Fussner, p. 258.

97. See Works, "Novum Organum," IV, 95 ff; "Descriptio Globi Intellectualis, V, 507-8.

98. Greenleaf treats the problem, p. 216.

99. Works, III, 453.

100. As Elton remarked in Political History: Principles and Practice, "The essence of historical description is unlimited variety; the essence of historical causation is multiplicity." (p. 124). Nevertheless, the historian works inductively from a "known conclusion to the courses sought for." (p. 125). The historian must work from effect to cause even if he narrates it the other way around. The best history is totally grasped so that a plenary sense of cause is known in advance of the writing and can inform from the very beginning. Even where there is analysis, the range of speculation is limited to the actual variables involved in the logical consequence of the situation.

101. Machiavelli made no qualms about urging the usefulness of history to governing and that true history should be followed by discourses. Bacon stated: "But this difference is not amiss to be remembered, that as history of Times is the best ground for discourse of government, such as Machiavel handleth, so histories of Lives is the most proper for discourse of business, as more conversant in private actions." Advancement of Learning, III, 453.

102. Preface to Henry VII, VI, 17.

103. Preface to Henry VII, VI, 18.

104. He did not stop the flow of the narrative to elaborate upon "secret aymes" and "inward cogitations". "But Thucydides is one, who, though he neuer digresse to reade a Lecture, Morall or Politicall, upon his owne Text, nor enter into mens hearts, further then the actions themselves euidently guide him, is yet accounted the most Politique Historiographer that euer writ." Eight Bookes of the Peloponnesian Warre, written by Thvcydides the sonne of Olorvs Interpreted with Faith and Diligence Immediately out of the Greeke By Thomas Hobbes (1629), sig. A3r - A3v.

105. Sir Francis Bacon, VI, 20.

106. C. A. Patrides, The Phoenix and the Ladder: The Rise and Decline of the Christian View of History (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1964), p. 14.

107. Patrides, p. 16.

108. Works, eds. Herford and Simpson, VIII, 567.

109. Evolution itself, it must be remembered, does not necessarily mean, applied to society, the movement of man to a desirable goal. It is a neutral, scientific conception, compatible either with optimism or with pessimism. According to different estimates it may appear to be a cruel sentence or a guarantee of steady amelioration. And it has been actually interpreted in both ways. J. B. Bury, The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Origin and Growth (New York, 1960), pp. 335-36.

110. A key passage is the speech by Arius in "Cleopatra" (1594), Works, Vol. III, p. 52 (lines 553-66).

111. Works, IV, 86.

112. Samuel Daniel, Works, III, 75.

113. Menandrinus (Marsilius), Patavinus. The Defender of Peace (The Defensor Pacis), trans. A. Gewirth (New York, 1967).

114. Samuel Daniel, Works, III, 100.

115. Cecil C. Seronsy, "The Doctrine of Cyclical Recurrence and Some Related Ideas in the Works of Samuel Daniel," Studies in Philology, LIV, No. 3 (July, 1957), 387-407.

116. F. Smith Fussner, p. 172.

117. Thucydides, trans. Thomas Hobbes, "Of the Life and History of Thucydides," A6r (?) (2/3).

118. Samuel Daniel, Works, II, 7.

119. Samuel Daniel, Works, II, 7.

120. F. Smith Fussner, p. 159.

121. "The Significance of Ben Jonson's First Requirement for Tragedy: 'Truth of Argument'," Studies in Philology, Vol. XLIX (April, 1952), pp. 195-213.

122. Herschel Baker, p. 80.

123. F. Smith Fussner, p. 47.

124. The Arte of English Poesie (1589), ed. Edward Arber (London, 1869), p. 55.

125. An Apology for Poetry, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (London, 1965), p. 107.

126. Sir Philip Sidney, Apology, p. 105.

127. Herschel Baker, p. 82. Also useful is the list of English history plays Appendix B of Irving Ribner's The English History Play in The age of Shakespeare although Roman plays are not included since Ribner is concerned only with plays on English subjects.

128. 'Discoveries', Works, VIII, 635.

129. "Discourses on the Heroic Poem" (1594), in Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, ed. Allan H. Gilbert (Detroit, Mich., 1952), p. 494.

130. "On the Composition of Romances," (Selection), in Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, p. 271. (Bacon's reply to the old argument has been cited above.)

131. "The Poetics of Aristotle Translated and Annotated" (1571) in Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, p. 305.

132. Lodovico Castelvetro, Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, p. 306.

133. The Works, ed. A. H. Bullen, 3 vols. (London, 1887), II, 235.

134. The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, ed. Fredson Bowers, 4 vols. (Cambridge, 1953-61), II (1955), 497.

135. Works, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Heath, 16 vols. (London, 1861-64), VI, 203.

136. Aristotle, "The Poetics," Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, p. 82.

137. Sir Francis Bacon, IV, 302.

138. Works Vol. III, 430; Vol. III, 538.

139. The Essays of Montaigne, trans. E. J. Trenchmann, 2 vols. (London, 1927), II, 405-8.

140. Aphorism xcviii, IV, p. 95.

141. Works, IV, 315.

142. Wilbur Sanders, p. 5 quoting from "Storia, Cronaca e False Storie" (1937), Filosofia, Poesia, Storia (Milan, 1951), p. 444.

143. The Idea of History (Oxford, 1946), p. 288.

144. The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare (London, 1965), p. 290.

145. H. B. Charlton, Shakespeare, Politics, and Politicians. The English Association, Pamphlet No. 72 (April, 1929), p. 13.

146. As They Liked It: An Essay on Shakespeare and Morality (New York, 1947), p. 160.

147. Alfred Harbage, p. 160.

148. The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson, ed. William B. Hunter Jr. pp. 144-147. (Line numbers refer to this edition of the text.)

149. Roger Ascham said in writing history, the "first, point was, to write nothyng false: next, to be bold to say any truth, wherby is auoyded two great faultes, flattery and hatred.... " Roger Ascham, English Works, ed. Wright (Cambridge, 1904), p. 126. Bacon, along the same lines, said that only a reputation among posterity mattered, "that a private man living in the same time should not doubt to publish an history of the time which should not carry any show or taste at all of flattery ... " Sir Francis Bacon, Works VI, 20. If Drummond got it right, Ben Jonson also offered, as a kind of credo in personal integrity and courage, that he "would not flatter though he saw Death." Conversations, p. 29.

150. William B. Hunter Jr., ed., "Epigramme XCV," p. 42.

151. Jonson had been at work before November 1627, on a history of King Henry V. Judging by the title it might have resembled the type of historical biography written by Bacon, Hayward and others, a political account of the monarchy during a single reign. He had finished eight of the nine years of the reign before the fire at his house burned it together with books borrowed from Cotton and Carew (the poet). The evidence is from Jonson's "An Execration upon Vulcan" (97-99). The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson, ed. William B. Hunter Jr., p. 190.

152. Sir Francis Bacon, Works, IV, 302.

153 Hunter, ed, "Epigramme XCV", ll. 19-23.

154. E. H. Carr, What is History? (London, 1964), pp. 20-24.

155. The Dramatist and the Received Idea (Cambridge, 1968), p. 11.

156. George H. Nadel, "History as Psychology in Francis Bacon's Theory of History," p. 248.

157. Myron P. Gilmore, p. 85.

158. Advancement of Learning (Bk. II), III, 438.

159. Sir Thomas Smith, De Republica Anglorum (London, 1583), Biiiir-Biiiiv.

160. William Allen, A True, Sincere, and Modest Defense of English Catholics, ed. Robert M. Kingdon (Ithaca, New York, 1965), p. 59.

161. Lewis Einstein, Tudor Ideals (New York, 1962), p. 22.

162. William Tyndale, The Obedience of A Christian Man (1528), Richard Lovett (London, n.d.), p. 85.

163. John Whitgift, The Works, ed. Rev. John Ayre, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1853), III, 586. One of the finest of such sermons is the one by Richard Hooker on civil obedience added to Bk. VIII, "Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity," Works, Vol. III. 456-60.

164. E. T. Davies, The Political Ideas of Richard Hooker (S.P.C.K. 1946; repr. 1948), p. 64.

165. Sir Thomas Smith, B iiii$^{r}$.

166. Sir John Hayward, An Answer to the First Part of A Certaine Conference Concerning Succession (London, 1603) D 3$^{r}$-D3$^{v}$.

167. Sir John Hayward, C2$^{r}$.

168. Stephen Gardiner, De Vera Obediencia: An Oration (1536) (Michael Wood, 25 October, 1553), Di$^{r}$.

169. U. M. Ellis-Fermor, Christopher Marlowe (Hamden, Conn., 1967), p. 93.

170. "Bodin's Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem (1566) argued that from an objective study of history men could discover the universal laws which guide the development of political institutions, and learn from them the unvarying principles of good government." M. M. Reese, p. 12.

171. The Essays of Montaigne, trans. E. J. Trechmann (Oxford, 1927) II. 405.

172. Myron Gilmore "Freedom and Determinism in Renaissance Historians," Studies in the Renaissance, III (1956), 49-60 (p. 54).

173. The Essays of Montaigne, II, 405.

174. "Freedom and Determination in Renaissance Historians," Studies in the Renaissance III (1956), 49-60 (p. 54).

175. The Histories, trans. W. R. Paton, 6 vols. (London, 1922), I. 3.

176. Richard Hooker, Works, III,475.

177. John Poynet, A Shorte Treatise of politike pouuer (1556), Gii$^{r}$-Gii$^{v}$.

178. Machiavellism: The Doctrine of Raison d'Etat and its Place in Modern History, trans. Douglas Scott (London, 1962; first pub. 1924), pp. 3-4.

179. H. B. Charlton, "Shakespeare, Politics, and Politicians," p. 18.

180. Innocent Gentillet, A Discovrse vpon the means of vvel Governing ... (London, 1602; Facsimile ed., Amsterdam, 1969).

181. Friedrich Meinecke, p. 12.

182. Friedrich Meinecke, p. 13.

183. "Raison d'état is a principle of conduct of the highest duplicity and duality; it presents one aspect to physical nature and another to reason." Friedrich Meinecke, p. 5.

184. Friedrich Meinecke, p. 19.

185. M. M. Reese, p. 159.

186. Induction, "Bartholomew Fayre" Works, VI, 17.

187. A. F. Pollard, The History of England, Vol. VI (London, 1923), VI, 440.

188. A. F. Pollard, VI, 442.

189. A. F. Pollard, VI, 442.

190. Political Thought in England: Tyndale to Hooker (London, 1953), pp. 5-26.

191. A. F. Pollard, VI, 440.

192. A. F. Pollard, VI, 442.

193. G. R. Elton, Political History: Principles and Practice, p. 160.

194. G. R. Elton, p. 164.

195. Sir Francis Bacon, "Aphorism XLV," Works, IV, 55.

196. Sir Francis Bacon, "Aphorism XLVI," Works, IV, 56.

197. Henry Thomas Buckle, I, 335.

198. Henry Thomas Buckle, I, 335.

199. R. A. Foakes, Shakespeare: the dark comedies to the last plays: from satire to celebration (London, 1971), p. 78.

200. J. A. Bryant believed that Jonson expected this knowledge from the viewers and that much of the fault of the play is in overestimating their ability to place the action in its historical context.

201. T. S. Eliot, The Sacred Wood, p. 105.

202. Irving Ribner, p. 128.

203. M. M. Reese, p. 47.

204. M. M. Reese, p. 46.

205. "The Rise of Secular Drama in the Renaissance," Studies in the Renaissance, Vol. III, ed. M. A. Shaaber (New York, 1956), p. 18.

206. Irving Ribner, p. 304.

207. F. Smith Fussner, p. 305.

# Chapter Four

## Sejanus and the Forms of Historical Tragedy

### I

There is, in Sejanus, a sense of restraint, learning, reflection, an eschewing of the spectacular and the melodramatic. These qualities have repeatedly been associated with art based upon classical ideals. Jonson was not alone in his regard for them. The academic literary tradition of the sixteenth century, though its influence had waned by the 1590s generally, had, nevertheless, established principles which were not abandoned in certain literary circles, perhaps best characterized by the group of dramatists associated with Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke. The closet drama in England was an outgrowth of the efforts of those literary reformers who sought to establish and purify English poetry: among them Gabriel Harvey, Edmund Spenser, Philip Sidney, and Dyer. They nourished a desire to develop English letters along lines established by continental writers and thereby join the greater community of Western European literature. Writers for the popular theater shared their ideals only ostensibly. At its worst their work looked like the efforts of sensationalist hacks catering to the ignorant. The achievements of that native popular drama eclipsed, almost totally, the academic tradition and the reforms it sought. Yet the principles of academic reform were never invalidated in the eyes of the intellectual literatti including those few who tried to effect them fully in plays designed for the public stage. It is a thesis in itself to show the currents of the academic

tradition alive in England in the 1590s and later. Kyd's strange decision to write a Cornelie after The Spanish Tragedie is a case in point. That the writer of the play which Jonson had virtually converted into the touchstone of excessive popular drama (See Everyman in his Humour, I. iv. where the ridiculous Bobodill reads from Kyd and exposes both himself and Kyd to ridicule) should turn to closet drama is a special example of the vitality of the tradition. "Instances like this sound a warning against depreciation of the academic drama. It is very likely that the subterranean influence of this superficially trivial and detached species was much more potent than now appears."[2]

Philip Sidney discussed, in An Apology for Poetry, the failings of English drama. The points were superficial ones for the most part - the mixture of genres and the failure to preserve the unities - but they were indicative. The Countess of Pembroke, perhaps only in sentimental memory of her brother, attempted to keep his precepts alive. She attracted a following of intelligent writers, including Fulke Greville and Samuel Daniel, who did not rehearse mere formulas in their works, but consciously developed an academic drama apart from the main stream of the popular theater. Intentionally or not, their work signified an abandonment of the theater to its own excesses.

The members of the Countess of Pembroke's group held little hope for the reformation of the English theater. They did not try to meet the audience half way.[3] This separates Jonson's tragedy from theirs. But the similarities between the political plays of Daniel, Greville and Jonson, for example, are marked.[4] It could be argued that Sejanus represents an effort to bridge the gap between the academic tradition and the popular by eliminating the stuffy formal irrelevancies of the former and by checking the sensational excesses

of the latter and that Sejanus is, therefore, a culminating effort in the tradition of the academic play.

Any textbook introduction to the drama of the period will explain that English renaissance drama developed simultaneously out of the native and the classical traditions, the one complementing the other. But for some Renaissance writers, classical order was never sufficiently imposed upon the sprawling native drama. One finds such complaints early. Ascham knew of only two plays which followed the rules of Aristotle.[5] George Whetsone in "The Epistle Dedicatorie" to Promos and Cassandra complained of the lack of unities, the absurd conventions of stage plays, the buffonery in the action. More serious yet was the lack of appropriate decorum, the use of one type of speech for all characters, the failure to provide clear moral instruction and the mixture of the grave with the comic.[6] Sidney offered similar criticisms, giving a further example of the ludicrousness of failing to imitate a reasonable span of time within the two hours of the play.[7] He spoke of using messengers to tell of non-representable actions and lamented the mixture of comic and tragic. Such principles as these seem to have become fairly fixed and frequently rehearsed in an effort to curb the popular stage. Yet the popular stage refused to bow to neo-classical disciplines. Such ideals continued to motivate attempted reforms including Jonson's Sejanus. But it was in the closet drama that writers were least forced to compromise; there the academic tradition was most clearly represented.

A play written to be read enjoys certain advantages. It need present no dramatic spectacle or rely upon dramatic encounters. It is

essentially a narrative form which is based upon a multiple point of view divided among the speaking characters. Such drama lends itself to the more "classical" Senecan practices, the reflective chorus at one remove from the action with its philosophical and often highly formalized verse, Seneca's general abundance of rhetoric and sentence. Closet dramatists did not have to mix genres to please their audiences. They could venture didactic statements and moral reflections more readily. Their plays were characterized by "a greater restraint" and a "chaster diction", attitudes which Jonson would have admired.[8] They explored serious themes as themes in dramatic language which was compressed and politically orientated. Stage villains and popular hero types disappeared. Narrative, itself, became action. These were reasons, in the interests of academic purity, for the perpetuation of the closet drama.

The principal thematic advantage to be gained was a greater freedom to deal in matters political. Perhaps the most explicit apology for the closet drama is to be found in Fulke Greville's life of Sidney. He spoke for Jonson and for Daniel as he described his outlook as a writer of political tragedies.[9] He wrote for men current in affairs of state, men who understood the types, political situations, principles of law, signs of ambition and corruption he wished to deal with. No common audience would be edified by his plays; mysteries of state were not for them. Such dramatic "narrative" was not designed for visual delight but an intellectual reconstruction for the mind, virtually an admission that the stage would have been in the way. The backdrop for the action was the state itself and the perceptive viewer, seeing the action in this context, could also see "beyond the Authors intention, or application, the vices of former

Ages being so like to these of this Age, as it will be easie to find out some affinity, or resemblance between them, which whosoever readeth with this apprehension, will not perchance thinke the Scenes too large, at least the matter not to be exceeded in account of words."[10] Greville's characters also represented political positions and concepts. Situations became veritably symbols of themselves, advancing the general in the particular. There was a continual concern with ambition and political power, counsellors, succession, foundations of state, the image of evil rulers.[11] Greville was a conscious maker. In the Life of Sir Philip Sidney he explained that his tragedies dealt with "the high waies of ambitious Governours" and with how audacity led to destruction.[12] He was not concerned with men lodging complaints against Providence as the ancients were, or with showing God's revenge upon individual sins and sinners. Greville was free from ancient and contemporary in devising a new subject matter dealing with states and political crises. Moreover, he dealt with the intricate causation behind political events and so built his plot rather than follow a bare classical skeleton of events or engage in popular intrigue plottings full of Italianate surprises and reversals.[13]

Jonson selected a subject and a manner of treating it dramatically which resembled Greville's. Both Mustapha and Alaham have to do with the dangers of royalty and with plots upon the lives of rulers. Greville's characters are even more calculated than Jonson's to serve the political problems under analysis. While he does not follow history as closely as Jonson, his treatment of issues still shows an understanding of the problems of power and political crises. Greville's work is also imbued with the spirit of Seneca the philosopher; his oppressed characters display a stoic integrity. They follow

philosophical and rational approaches to political affairs. Political problems related to obedience and rebellion arise as matters of debate. Greville offers a multiple point of view, revealing his political world from many sides at once. M. W. Croll believes that because of Greville's philosophical orientation, his inclination to build plays around thought and argument, a new category of criticism is required for them.[14] It is the drama of politics in which popular Seneca is exchanged for the philosophical Seneca. The classical rules of composition are not indefensible in such a work. Here they do contribute to right proportion and a concise treatment of the subject under consideration. It is a s a form of political drama with its use of the classical modes of composition, its rhetorical texture, its semi-abstract characterization, its orientation toward problem solving and thought that these plays have importance in the history of the drama. If Jonson did not learn from these plays individually, he at least sympathized with the principles which generated them.

Samuel Daniel's closet dramas deserve consideration because Daniel employed, more than any in his group, the more flexible techniques of staged plays in an effort to illustrate his themes. Daniel was less bound to the rigid aspects of strict classical composition. He was willing to employ crowds on the stage. He multiplied the action, kept monologues to a minimum, used the messenger less for reporting action, and developed a more compelling sense of conflict in a theatrical sense. It was possible to rewrite Philotas in such a way that it became viable on the stage.[15] Daniel was, as a closet dramatist, the closest to the stage, indicating from

his point of practice how the two forms might be joined, while Jonson, as a writer for the theater, inclined almost as far toward the academic closet tradition.

Daniel's Philotas is not easy to characterize in a paragraph. It lends itself to diverse categorizations depending upon the vantage point of the critic. The play has little action, the speeches remain long, there is a chorus at the end of each of the first three acts, the catastrophe is related by a messenger. As in Sejanus the principal scene is a trial scene, necessarily rhetorical. Daniel also tries to prevent sympathetic attachments with any of his characters. He is more concerned with the logistics of situation, principles of law, justice, tyranny.[16] He is alert to duplicity, to private ambition disguised as public good. Alexander is studied both as rightful ruler and tyrant, Philotas as the great man who yet conspired against his king. Daniel does not race toward easy political didacticisms. There is a strong stoic bent. Choral admiration for Philotas is based on his ability to suffer nobly.[17] Jonson allows Sejanus a similar nobility in his death, a man no more innocent, but never reduced to a villain.[18] The point is that once freed of academic rigidity this drama showed promise of becoming a new form of art concentrating on the tragedies of states. The renaissance attempted to produce, more than once, an art fitted to the emergence of modern states. It was the tyranny of popular favor or government suppression which baulked what was a kind of natural tendency. When Jonson lamented both false applications, the work of "common torturers", and the undeveloped tastes of the theater crowds, (the good of the development of drama apart) he knew precisely why that form of drama he was concerned with would gain so slim a hearing.

History as tragedy was a central element in Philotas. "I thought the representing so true a History, in the ancient forme of a Tragedy, could not but have had an unreproveable passage with the time ...."[19] His delight was in history carefully represented "without interlacing other invention ... "[20] History pursued as art, entails a copiousness of character and incident which, though verisimular, is often too unwieldy for the drama. Classical form is a kind of imposed restriction to keep this barrage of material in order. When events are converted into plot, the play is threatened by overcomplication. Drama begins to feel its limits. The danger is obscurity, a greater danger to the life of art than intellectual fatuity, even though it is a sin of genius. Daniel and Jonson worked toward solving the problems of presenting a multiplicity of historical materials in a unified work.

Political conflicts are often paradoxical. Yet such paradoxes cannot be ignored by intelligent observers of the political life.[21] Basic conflicts in the definition of political society forced these political dramatists into using compromised literary forms because the set conventional forms were too rigid and inflexible, too tied to an antiquated world order. Daniel clung to certain convenient patterns, especially the De casibus one, yet there is the Greek elegaic mood in the choruses of Philotas and a sense of waste as the essence of his tragedy. Philotas promotes a sense of complexity to the extent that the audience must sympathize yet must sit in judgement. Jonson shows an even greater capacity to bring his play to a close on a dissonant chord, one which invites thought rather than emotional satisfaction. The villain not quite a villain is toppled; the tyrant not quite a tyrant holds the field; the victims, not quite helpless, are dismayed yet resolved to endure. The agent of justice is yet another monster.

The state is visibly unaltered yet damaged beyond reclaim; the mobs are pacified but unpunished; the constitutional conflict prevails, the successors are still in banishment. None of the comforts of C-major fiction pertain. Judgement could never be simple because the ambiguity for Jonson, as for Daniel, grew out of the separate moralities which direct the social and the political life.[22] Thus, the techniques and issues of the closet drama indicate not a reactionary classical and formal drama but a new medium suitable for dealing with political issues and for devising a related form of tragedy.

The satiric or bitterly critical element enters when the writer becomes so immersed in the problems he treats that there is a sense of being overwhelmed by corruption. The condition of art and the condition of society may be correlated. There are traces, throughout the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods, of a nostalgia for the earlier, simpler Tudor order.[23] Daniel felt this rather strongly. In the dedication of Philotas "To the Prince" he lamented the bad reception of the play by wishing it had been written earlier when it would have been appreciated. "But yeeres hath done this wrong,/To make me write too much, and live too long."[24] A similar kind of nostalgia is suggested by the republican senators in Sejanus who look back to Cato and Germanicus. This was a form of political criticism, not a denial of or retreat from harsh existing conditions. The dream of an age of order was linked to the promotion of moral art. For Jonson, literature was degraded by tumult; history was a form of literature. Political injusticesuppressed that discipline. Art must then turn upon those factors in society causing its decline and, with its diluted grace, censure the times by exposure, description, ridicule. What is discovered, meanwhile, is the fixed principle of political

unrest where ambition and corruption reign. The strength of the cure explains the danger of the disease. The golden ge was never to come. Art moved from idealism to realism and finally to a stark gaping into the abyss of corruption.

Daniel also defines the plight of the political victim. The chorus in Cleopatra serves as the body politic, the voice of the multitude lamenting injustice.

> (Chor) But is it Justice that all we
> The innocent poore multitude,
> For great mens faults should punisht be,
> And to destruction thus pursude?"[25]

Jonson, too, is concerned with those who are caught in the web of statecraft and wasted, paradoxically, by what may be called the necessities of state. There is no sentimentalization, but Jonson generates a fair portion of his dramatic emotion out of a consideration of their fates. There is confusion in Daniel's choruses because they are sometimes the mob, sometimes a moral vantage point. Jonson overcomes that perplexity by introducing choric characters into the play as men subject to the limitations of any character, capable of only limited understanding. It allows for a variety of responses to arise from a single observer as circumstances change. Yet Jonson so characterizes such men as Arruntius and Sabinus that we trust their moral choices. L. C. Knights said "The 'good' characters are choric and denunciatory merely, representing no positive values."[26] It is true that they offer the criticisms Jonson most condones, but these same men offer such criticisms in response to the attack which is made upon their party and themselves personally. They uphold positive values as republicans and stoics and bear the brunt of Sejanus' designs. If they are choric it is with the difference that they are fully

participants as well, with everything at stake including their lives. They represent a political position and the principles of freedom from tyranny. They offer the only chance of resistance to sheer ambition and die in that course. It is for this reason that Sejanus may be described as a tragedy of the victim. It could also be described as the tragedy of the chorus.

Daniel began with history, in which case he had to find a story which was half-way plot already.[27] To that he might add moral reflections, condense and adapt the material to mold it into a play, provide speeches for men according to the occasion and thus illuminate the original action. But Daniel was attracted to moral forms which were virtually a habit of mind and so compromised his historiography. Where the familiar De casibus pattern and rhetoric suggested themselves, Daniel enhanced and enforced them. The study of law, the portraits of counsellors, the trial scenes are subordinated to the moral contained in the accounts of the ambitious lifted up and brought low. Jonson, in following history more closely, freed himself the more from this pattern.

Sejanus belongs to the tradition of the closet drama because it is a rhetorical play based upon Roman themes treated with classical restraint. Jonson considered his work a tragic poem and developed it as an essay upon politics. There is a vestigial chorus and a concern for achieving the dignity and eloquence which comes from imitating formal and heightened speech. But the similarity is not so much in the details of composition as in the disposition of the work, its scope of interests, moral concerns and concentration upon thought rather than action.

Jonson need not have been directly influenced by the closet dramatists, and if we can take Sejanus as a sample of Jonson's critical preferences, Jonson would also have had his complaints against the Pembroke circle. Often their work was crabbed, pedantic, stiff in its conception of problems and characters. Jonson, writing for the theater, does not create a mechanical fable full of balanced portions, followed by set speeches and canned reflections. He unfolds his problems through the action, the relation of persons, through encounter and competition. He goes out of his way neither to create additional spectacle nor to avoid what there is of a spectacular nature in his sources which can be included on the stage. The death of Silius is portrayed. The collapse of the cave at Speclunca is not. The capturing of Sabinus is shown. The dismemberment of Sejanus is related by messenger. There are no set elegies, no formal laments, no long dispassionate disquisitions on statecraft; the frightful symmetry is not there. Characters genuinely encounter characters and language is flexibly employed, sometimes approaching the colloquial. Yet few words are spent which do not shape events and alter fates. Thus, Jonson's play is more remarkable than any of the closet plays because it is not cut off from techniques of the theater. Jonson was confident enough to preserve what he thought was good from both traditions. There are more textures of thought in Sejanus because emphases change; sometimes the satiric is uppermost, then intrigue, then political logic and sometimes there is a complex intermingling. The differentiating factor for H. B. Charlton is Jonson's "realism". Unlike the French Senecans who went to Roman history for an allegory of political principles, Jonson seeks there "the antiquarian detail

which is the source of his realism of incident and setting; he seeks in it, too, the well-authenticated figures who provide thereby literal truth of character."[28] This realism curbs the Senecan extravagances, the lyric effusion and is the heart of Jonson's theatrical art. Jonson's characters are not the impersonal declaimers of Garnier. In this way Jonson had a chance of reforming the "people's Seneca without destroying his popularity."[29]

I have not set up the closet dramatists merely to be knocked down by the comparison. They were the creators of a true political drama in English and kept alive the proportions and techniques of Senecan drama controlled and refined by the French practitioners from whom they learned their craft. Witherspoon is still essentially right in saying that "there was, without doubt, a much greater respect for the academic drama, which they fostered, among the members of the literary and dramatic profession of their day than is evident to us three centuries after them. Many who wrote openly for the popular stage were in their hearts attached to the principles of the classical drama."[30] As adherents to classical rules they are less relevant to a study of Jonson than as originators of a political tragedy which is in turn dependent upon the drama as a read rather than an acted medium. So similar are the techniques Jonson employed that Jonas A. Barish in his Introduction to the Yale edition of the play suggests that "Sejanus His Fall belongs to that small band of plays destined to survive mainly as 'closet' drama, yet paradoxically owing their survival to the fact of having been conceived for the stage."[31] It is useful, critically, to think of Sejanus as a closet drama altered to work on the stage. Yet, at the same time, Sejanus should be considered as a reformed version of the popular Roman history play. A play such as Julius

Caesar could have been an equally important model, a type of play which Jonson desired to develop and bring to a state of greater political and structural perfection in terms of its own ideal proportions and purposes.[32]

## II

There had been a tradition of Roman plays in the popular theater which included Shakespeare's Julius Caesar (c. 1599). T. J. B. Spencer has pointed out that the Roman play showed evidence of a great antiquarian interest. Shakespeare revealed a keen respect for historical verity in his Roman plays, especially in Coriolanus. It was a scholarly effort, for which Dryden, Pope and Tate praised him.[33] There were distinct properties and attitudes which these critics expected of all Roman plays. They had to be serious and scholarly, accurate in their description of Rome, works in which a learned man could delight.[34] Because of the re-creation of the Roman milieu, these plays tended to break away more readily from ideas of providential history and to create a wholly secular view of the state and of power as an amoral force. Roman history lent itself to a consideration of general issues: freedom, power, individual will in relation to the state systems.[35] The Roman play was seeking a Roman statement inherent in its own materials, but in seeking such a fulfillment it looked toward its own death as a popular art form no matter how perfectly its issues reflected present circumstances. The distance through which it gained political perspective also made it alien to the English audiences.

Patience with political rhetoric and sententiae apparently grew shorter. Yet the Roman play was the natural "sub-category" of the history play through which political history and tragedy might be developed independently of the medieval chronicler's world.

The characteristic political themes of the Roman play were originally informed by the humanistic tradition of the sixteenth century. Political plays repeatedly dwelt upon the notion that tyranny was its own punishment and that ambition was the greatest vice in a prince or counsellor. The essay was always balanced with reminders that to rebel against one's prince, under any circumstances, was the greatest breach of the peace and that such rebels never escaped justice. A variety of interpretative forms emerged simultaneously which became traditional though not suited for the advancement of purely Roman issues. More often, political actions were interpreted as the punishment of corrupt magistrates by God, suggesting a principle of retribution in the order of things.

There was, in Jonson's England, a restraint placed upon all who criticized the power of the monarchy, a theme endemic to the Roman play. Of the political themes, Professor Spencer has cited the main one. "The problem of the difference between a benevolent monarchy and an odious tyranny, and the gradations by which the one may merge into the other - that was the real interest; and Imperial Rome was the true material for that."[36] Jonson made those gradations a part of his political study and built a plot out of the encounter between those who feared tyranny and those who feared treason and out of the decline of an empire. It was the natural thematic course for the Roman play to take and Jonson, working clearly in that tradition, brought it to a conclusion. It was, of course, a dangerous tendency to follow because of censorship. From a structural point of view there were further

difficulties because Jonson's insights into the manner in which freedom slipped into oppression by gradations, into a society doomed by its own blindness due to apathy and decadence, were themes too complex to be conveyed in the theater. In following the implications of this political tendency in the Roman play Jonson had to offer a gloomy and pessimistic political outlook. History, tragedy and satire joined in the creation of a world view which men did not want to contemplate. Sejanus may be considered as a further exploration of the potential of the Roman play, a form which was dying out in the theaters by the time Sejanus appeared.

## III

Seneca, as an influence upon the English drama, is usually discussed in terms of the formal ingredients in his plays: the rhetoric, the characters, ghosts, choruses, messengers, the maxims and revenge motifs. Seneca the thinker, the political victim, the stoic, the preceptor to Nero barely emerges in his plays, possibly because he did his own work badly. One can only wonder that Seneca did not concentrate more upon Neronian conditions in his drama, but his plays do not get in touch with those terrible times in which he lived. The absence of a play writing and acting tradition in Rome was a severe disadvantage. Moreover, Seneca was not strong enough to escape the influence of the Greeks and write a truly Roman drama. The Greek forms he employed were insufficiently adapted to fit Roman conditions.[38] Seneca's was a drama which had not reached its fullest potential. Subsequent classicists had to reform and perfect even their "master".

Euripides was, to Seneca's eye, the most progressive and useful of the Greek tragedians. It was he who most advanced themes of revenge, sexual interests, prologue ghosts, the wordy nuntius, the philosophical chorus separated from the plot, the stychomythic dialogue. H. B. Charlton has discussed the liturgical and ritualistic aspects of the Greeks. Their plays were like oratorios, like a "mimetic celebration".[39] Seneca's plays lack such full orchestration. In copying the Greeks he supplied only the libretti.[40] In order to make sense of the Greek elements Seneca assigned new functions to them. The chorus was re-employed as a philosophical point of view virtually detached from the action. It lost the religious dimensions. The unities, essential to the Greeks, became an academic exercise. The messenger was used to fill in the narrative with passages of description, to relate events awkward or too bulky to dramatize.[41] Rhetoric and the moral aims of the plays were joined together. Seneca added sentences in the form of proverbs, maxims and summarized wisdom.[42] That which could be called the "terrible" in Greek tragedy became the "horrible" in Seneca. There was always a sense of the spectacular, the bizarre, the monstrous, a melodramatic version of what was once awesome and wonderful.[43] In the place of divine justice and retribution as a central action, Seneca built upon plots of revenge and the fear which man realizes as a helpless victim to that malign fortune which is more than "crass casualty". It was a circuitous kind of proposition. The proof of fortune's more than indifferent cruelty was to be found in the tales of men stricken down mercilessly. Yet that same force must be posited in advance as the cause of their falls. Meanwhile, purpose and justice in the spiritual world were lost and the sense of causation

which explained human failure in terms of the systems and mores by which men lived were imperfectly explored.

Seneca was almost singly responsible for the hero-centric concept of plotting. He chose the most spectacular individuals from the semi-history of myth and placed them in a context charged by rhetoric.[44] His characters sham profundity, though it is possible to discover something like the psychological by peering through their declamations: the man "striving against fate". Where action is sparse, even self-analytic statements serve to reveal dimensions of character which, though they give the appearance of the psychological, are often contrivances for gaining an elementary sympathetic effect.

The influence of Seneca went three ways in the development of European drama in the 16th century. The French exaggerated the artificiality, the strict forms and developed a highly rigid, academic drama. The Italians built upon Seneca's horrors and exploited all the melodramatic effects. The English borrowed both aspects and infused them into a native tradition. The French tradition has been described, indirectly, in terms of its influence upon English closet drama. Charlton argues that because the French Senecans in England did not write for the stage they could not have influenced the English drama prior to 1610.[45] Popular Seneca in England was augmented by the use which the Italians had made of him. Cinthio, who explained his principles of art in a letter to Guilio Ponzo Ponzoni published in 1554 as the Discorso ... intorno al comparre delle comedie e delle tragedie, produced something like tragi-comedy by devising a horror tale which moved through a maze of pseudo-tragic turns before arriving

at a happy ending. Cinthio is to be associated with Tasso, Guarini and Fletcher; he does not represent the Jonsonian direction at all.[46] He invented wild intrigue plots and indulged the audience in their desire for thrills and happy resolutions. In short the audience was everything to Cinthio; success upon the stage was his primary goal. Yet Cinthio followed Seneca in virtually everything: plotting, character types, tragic gravity, a Roman use of the chorus adapted to his own theatrical ends. By exciting the surface emotions Cinthio found a way of giving Seneca a popular appeal. Roman history was "too fixed in detail and too urbane in atmosphere to admit of extensive exploitation for effect" in Cinthio.[47] His subjects were lesser known, more brutal and barbaric ones. There was none of the discipline of history in his plays.[48] History, for Jonson, took precedence over pseudo-historical wonders with the result that not even Tiberius' world could produce men flayed alive and children served to their parents for supper by their enemies.

The formless native drama of England required discipline. Seneca was the standard model for a regularized external form. Senecan elements, easily traced, are the blood revenge motifs, the inevitability of fate's decrees, the mounting of horrors, the tragic machinery, ghosts, choruses, foreboding dreams. In the English tradition there was a superimposition of the native vice upon the Roman villain, the De casibus moral tradition upon the working of fate, the proverbs of the people upon the classical sententiae. Senecan ghosts were ever fused with medieval superstititons. So the popular drama emerged. G. K. Hunter argues that "the Gothic willingness to juxtapose things historically distinct, preferring flat anachronism to the perspective of history, made such assimilations both inevitable and easy."[49]

The Roman drama suggested certain psychological techniques, the rhetoric of rage, self-pity, eulogy, elegy, the angry tyrant. Seneca's plays included romance, sex intrigue, oriental sumptuousness and splendor and passionate crimes. Seneca showed ways of arranging materials and introduced the dumb show mime allowing for a combination of native and classical ideas. Native techniques managed to assert themselves by incorporating all the classical machinery while remaining essentially unhampered by the unities, small casts, and the conventional stage decencies of the rigid classicists. More psychologically developed characters replaced the chorus. Again theatrical success was the measure.

The feeling grew that insofar as the native tradition had been taken over by Seneca it had to be purified from Seneca himself. Complaints against the popular and Italianate Seneca had been continuously present with the rise of the drama. Thomas Nash stated that because "Seneca, let blood line by line and page by page, at length must needes die to our Stage .... "[50] Bombast had crept in through inflated imitations. Nash lashed out at poetasters who wrote such fustian in the Roman manner, following "vain-glorious tragedians" who tried to outwrite the great poets with mere exaggeration of effect. The complaint fixed itself in many critical minds. The paradox is that Nash was urging a kind of neo-classical restraint to be exercised over the effects produced by following one of the most influencial classical writers.

It is my thesis that Jonson was one of these reformers and that Seneca had little influence upon him as a dramatist directly or in his Italianate form. (The ethical Seneca will be treated later.) Seneca was a playwright of spectacular effects. He chose sensational themes

and devised plots merely to illustrate the sensational. But the tragedy of horror does not produce the worthiest of emotions. J. W. Cunliffe states that he drives on the sense of the horrible till it becomes "disgusting". He exaggerates passion till it becomes "ridiculous".[51] Likewise, Senecan form became too much the point for its own sake. Despite the prologue "To the Reader", Jonson shows no inclination to follow conventionalized Senecan forms. It is not a play laden with intrigue plots, revenge motifs and ghosts. Other Senecan elements omitted may be briefly listed: dreams foretelling disasters, set laments, abundant ornamental reference, cryptic artificial dialogue, horrible crimes for the sake of the bizarre. There is none of the formally balanced characterization, the good counsellor and the bad as in Gorboduc; the struggle is a political one and no simple battle between good and evil.

To see the difference one may compare Sejanus with Marston's Sophonisba, a scholarly work done for the popular stage. Marston did not intend to miss and made fun of Jonson's scholarship. The way to success was still Seneca. The play is political but full of rhetoric in the sophistic style. It is formalized in structure with parallel speeches and foil characters, full of action. The subject is Roman but it is not historically treated. The play employs the dumb show, messengers, a ghost, a witch, a fury, a tyrant, a pathetic heroine and the familiar themes of sexual intrigue and familiar political conflicts and formulations worked out of the historical setting. It is full of sententiae and the style is enlarged to appear fully Senecan. It has home-made gravity. There is a background study in tyranny and the political life. But for going in so many directions at once - sensational, political, rhetorical, stoical - it is a hodge-podge of effects. It is

lacking in the unity of effect Jonson gained by following the facts and spirit of history.

It may be added here that Sejanus implies, by all that is omitted from it, a critique of the native elements in the drama. There are no troops of singing boys, no dances or courtly festivities, no clowns to accompany Tiberius or court jesters to give him witty advice. Sejanus has no confidants who can work him for the ironies' sake. There are no fops and dandies about court, no wits in fine clothes, no joustings or duels, no weddings, banquets at Agrippina's house to show a "before" of happiness, no embassies, no indication of a procession at Tiberius' entrance to show off the Globe Theater's wardrobe, no masques or other fantastic or symbolic spectacles. They did not belong to the play or its world. Jonson was guided by a clear sense of what belonged to political tragedy. The popular drama seemed to dissipate its powers by being indiscriminately inclusive. (In eliminating all these "distractions," of course, Jonson deprived his audience of its cherished delights.) The significant thing is that Jonson, so much in touch with the tradition, worked independently as a dramatist. It is because the new history required its own dramatic forms and therefore historians, especially Tacitus, gave more useful directives on style. The point to be proved is how independent of the popular drama and of the Aristotelian rule-setters Jonson really was. If Jonson was a "neo-classical" writer, he was so in a still different sense.

## IV

Perhaps the most misleading critical statement on the play is Jonson's own "To the Readers", not that Jonson has given any false or irrelevant information about the play, but because his terms, "a proper chorus", "dramatic poems" and "Horace his Art of Poetry", suggest a widening ring of references and associations in the wrong pool. Jonson abandoned the chorus and the unities, not because he did not think them proper to tragedy but because he did not think his play would have a chance in the theater if he kept them. He then went on to state the four "rules" essential to the office of a tragic writer, making sure that none could accuse him of ignorance for omitting elements expected in a classical tragedy. No "true poem" had been written since the ancients. It had not been achieved even by those who employed as many of the "rules" of dramatic composition as possible (ll. 8-10). Nevertheless, Jonson appeared to hold these classical ideals in high regard, lamenting the compromises necessary for the "preservation of any popular delight" (ll. 14-15). Therefore, it is tempting to pursue all the ramifications of the four essential rules which Jonson offered, to define his classical attachments in these terms and to trace their origins in the works and commentaries of the ancients. The difficulty is that in reducing the tragic rules to these four: "truth of argument, dignity of persons, gravity and height of elocution, fullness and frequency of sentence", (ll. 18-19) Jonson left little more than clichés.[52] These injuctions are neither specific nor enlightening and they relate only to style. The first one, "truth of argument", suggests something potentially significant, but Jonson's historiography goes far beyond the implications of this phrase which, after all, may be traced back to the Italian critics as well.[53]

One cannot dispute the other principles, as far as they go. Tragedy demands a decorum fitted to its own themes and purposes. A marked concern with suffering and misery can have no effect without a weighted and sober style. There is such an undiluted seriousness in Sejanus, perhaps more sustained than in other political tragedies, but less exalted in passages dealing with grief, outrage, injustice and spiritual speculation. Nicoll's statement holds true for Jonson, that tragedy "will never rise above purely sordid levels" unless it shows a "grandeur of spirit and of character, the universality of the emotions, the rich rhythm of the verse, and the sense of noble purpose and lofty morality."[54] The danger is in tracing that decorum, that tragic dignity, back to the "rules" rather than to the historical subject matter which generated it. Raymond Williams stated that "the neo-classical rules for tragedy, while assuming that tragic themes must be historical because they must concern great matters of state, tended to argue from the necessary dignity of tragedy rather than from its general and representative quality."[55] Dignity then became a matter of following rhetorical conventions; the artist of "rules" tended to concentrate upon matters of style, ornaments of sound and sense. The whole matter of history was taken for granted and thus undeveloped. That body of scholarship, the work of Aristotelian explicators and formal critics is, perhaps, the least fruitful source for discovering the classical elements of Jonson's style in Sejanus.

Neo-classicism suggests further connotations which do not fit Jonson. He was not bound to any set authority. Jonson himself cautioned against slavish use of the ancients. He urged that they be used "as Guides, not Commanders".[56] Moreover, John Dryden saw no reason why Jonson should be criticised for the use he made of his reading since "he invades authors like a monarch and what would be

theft in other poets is only victory in him."[57] That Jonson invaded "like a monarch" is a type of proof of his freedom as a thinker. There can be little doubt that Jonson was grounded upon the classics, but he is "just as deeply imbued with the spirit of Bacon's Novum Organum."[58] He borrowed, transformed, worked free from the tyranny of any authority. He was in touch with many traditions at once. George Steiner believed that Jonson's erudition was the essential mark of his neo-classical fervor and that in trying to impress his audience with his learning he flawed the play.[59] J. A. Symonds made a similar complaint that a determination to be exhaustive belonged to "some essentially scientific quality of Jonson's mind."[60] Even in the eighteenth century tedious scholarship was Jonson's earmark. "The famous Ben Jonson!/Dry ... "[61] But while Jonson placed a great emphasis upon scholarship and perhaps meant to use the weight of his erudition in order to command the respect if not the attention of his audience, it was only a part of his neo-classical mentality.

The term neo-classical as it applies to Jonson, may either be dispensed with or employed to describe those attitudes peculiar to Jonson, which he held with regard to the structural and moral integrity of art, historical truth, right moral axioms and the integrity of the artist himself. For Jonson, neo-classicism is a spirit of skepticism in matters of politics and history and of restraint in matters of dramatic style. Control, the "made" work of art, well studied with nothing left to impression or inspiration, characterize his attitudes toward composition. But most important, neo-classicism implies a connection with the tradition on the level of ideas which makes Jonson "classical in the best sense, in that his standards are

those of the central current of the humane tradition, continuous though frequently submerged; and have their sanction not merely in the theories of certain classical writers and the practices of others, but in permanent values which are simultaneously moral and aesthetic."[62] It is an appealing statement and I believe true in suggesting Jonson's detachment from particular schools of art and thought called "neo-classical". Skepticism, reservation, proportion, verifiability are slightly more accurate in stating Jonson's approach to history and composition. Neo-classicism with regard to Sejanus amounts more particularly to the standards of composition Jonson employed in creating a dramatized political history and is the exact counterpart to his skepticism in the treatment of historical materials.

Restraint must often be demonstrated by what is omitted from the work. Thus, the list above of all the elements in the drama both native and classical in origin which Jonson did not include for the sake of following formulae. It was his subject which determined the level of decorum in the play. There are certain passages hinting of inappropriate levels which Jonson was tempted to treat but resisted. Ridicule, especially as it is conveyed through the foolishness which exposes the fool to others, was one of Jonson's major occupations in the comedies. When we have Sejanus' followers described as men who "Laugh when their patron laughs; sweat when he sweats;/Be hot and cold with him; change every mood,/Habit and garb, as often as he varies;/ Observe him, as his watch observes his clock;" (I. 33-36) one can envision a dramatized counterpart which could barely escape the ridiculous. How easily Satrius and Natta could be made to display just this kind of obsequious fawning, praise Sejanus for trivial things, notice his new

toga, remark his every word, perform menial services for him. But Jonson does not convert Silius' acrid hyperbole into a comic subplot. It would have been good drama but bad history. More significant was Jonson's observation that in politics there is a public demeanor which disguises the hardened ambition of men. Even Patrius and Natta had to remain serious figures and men to be reckoned with. Jonson preserved this "level" of style because a serious narrative on the affairs of the Roman state and the gravity of the issues required it. On the other side, Jonson did not allow men to surfeit in "tragic" rhetoric which is uncharacteristic. Such would have been an equal distraction from the issues of state. Characters are highly differentiated, Agrippina from Cordus, Arruntius from Lepidus. But Agrippina's essential anger remains in proportion to her role and Cordus' essential rationality seeks its proportionate place in the larger debate over integrity in the public life.

Despite the fact that Jonson relied upon Tacitus for the facts about Silius, he nevertheless designed the character through the speeches he created for him. History only demanded that Jonson begin at point A - the accusation against him for treason - and finish with point B - his suicide.

> Come, do not hunt
> And labor so about for circumstance,
> To make him guilty whom you have foredoomed.
> Take shorter ways; I'll meet your purposes.
> The words were mine, and more I now will say:
> Since I have done thee great service, Caesar,
> Thou still hast feared me, and in place of grace
> Returned me hatred. So soon all best turns,
> With doubtful princes, turn deep injuries
> In estimation, when they greater rise
> Than can be answered. III. 295-305.

Jonson "created" Silius out of short, pointed, unqualified statements. In the language there is strength, a power of rebuke, and preparation

for a calm death. The opening lines have a colloquial vigor which is yet formal and economical. "Take shorter ways; I'll meet your purposes", is a confident statement as well as a statement about confidence. His powers of reason do not escape him in this crisis. He is able to point out the implications of his service to Caesar as well as the fact of it. There is no metaphor, no imagery, no rhetoricizing in the ways expected of Romans making death speeches.

This is Jonson at the height of his style in creating Silius at the height of his style. Silius commands yet is not haughty. The strength of his point is in the integrity of his character. His suicide is the proof of his statement. The point is simply yet skillfully made: when men deserve rewards greater than princes can pay, their deeds are read as injuries. It is a tyrant's jealous will which demands Silius' death. The statement comes almost as "sentence" yet is woven naturally into the speech. The language fits the man, yet it also establishes the sense of decorum for the whole play. Jonson's classical style is "contained" in the men and the situations he chose to write about. His sense of the tragic is one with his sense of what is tragic in history. The "made" speeches are refined and controlled - never prolix and redundant; they do not thrill with classroom rhetoric. The control has left none of the tinsel which usually gains notice and passes for excellence in the style of others. The world of the play seems smaller because there are no references and allusions in the verbiage; Silius does not call upon the gods or threaten the vaults of heaven. But Jonson's characters are for that no less real. Jonson's classicism is manifested essentially in his style, the cues for which he takes from history itself guided by his own sense of restraint and proportion.

Sejanus is fully dramatic insofar as Jonson trusts dialogue alone to express the issues arising from history, giving up two of the most common means for providing additional vantage points upon the action: the chorus and an abundant use of soliloquy. He exploits rather than resists his medium for achieving a complex action. Classicism for Jonson is in employing the variables of theater without introducing strained conventions. There is a unity of style, a sustained concentration of action following history toward a climax, a singleness of tone throughout, a complete sense in which all parts of the play "belong" to the same work. That the play is "naive", too studied and full of patch-work scholarship are common criticisms, but that it lacks "homogeneity of style and material" is a surprising assessment. To say that Jonson fuses the chattiness of Suetonius with Tacitus' "gloomily penetrating and disillusioned comments on men" would be difficult to demonstrate from the play.[63] Jonson's use of Suetonius is limited, the play is never chatty, nor does the gloom enter the texture of the verse. It enters through the logic of the situation in its totality. Sejanus is, from passage to passage, remarkably businesslike. Men are baited, accused, defend themselves with the language of workaday politics: "Let him grow awhile;/His fate is not yet ripe. We must not pluck/At all together, lest we catch ourselves./And there's Arruntius too, he only talks." (II. 296-99). This is the height of Sejanus' plot against the senatorial opposition. Let him sell this to Tiberius and he is set. Two politicians calmly discuss strategy. No line could be more common than the last, but behind it is a sinister design against civil liberties and life through a shrewd insight into Machiavellian political manipulation. When Sejanus feigns chattiness he is at his darkest; this is not the gossipy stuff of Suetonius. Meanwhile, even Tiberius' letter to the

Senate is read out with business-like deliberation. The whole play has symbolic and thematic proportions which are controlled by Jonson's sense of dramatic architectonic. Tacitean gloom emerges only after political confrontation and scheming are compounded into a vision of corruption and ruin in the mind of the viewer. Thus, Eliot can say, and rightly, the "emotional tone is not in the single verse, but in the design of the whole."[64]

The secularism of the play is, perhaps, its most pronounced neo-classical distinction. English Renaissance drama was secular only rarely, if ever. First, the pagan qualities of Roman life suggested a sobriety which discouraged any blending of comedy and tragedy. Secondly, and more important, the Roman milieu challenged the artist to find a moral frame of reference devised out of values lacking transcendental dimensions. The essence of morality in the secular play had to be found in the society under examination. More difficult to solve was the creation of a moral form in the play, itself. Jonson was not totally successful because vestiges of Christian plotting survived.[65] But the weight of the play is upon the morality of the struggle of men relying upon their own strength to withstand overwhelming corruption. Moreover, such moral order is reflected in the style, the posture of the historian, and the accuracy of his reporting of political causes. Sejanus carried the responsibility of seeking a moral order in a world where traditional values had broken down. Tragedy grew out of the loss of those values which alone raised men to tragic significance. Nothing could be more tragic than a world in which man-made institutions alone gave man dignity and secured his rights when it is discovered that imperfectibility is the nature of those institutions.

Jonson refrained from overusing literary forms as ends in themselves; his classicism was in his comprehension of the historical. The classical style was not a matter of imitation, but an ideal of composition based on the "closed" style, characterizing a work clearly reasoned, self-contained, unifed in tone and character with a clear moral intent. The Greeks and Romans practised such an art first, but the classical spirit has been a recurrent principle in almost all ages since. Whether or not one can subscribe to the degree to which Jonson desired to reform the English drama, yet his vision of the restrained, scholarly, well-made rational play may be admired as one of the great ideals of art.

V

" ... Seneca's effect was chiefly upon dramatic technique, hardly at all upon language, and only a little more upon ideas."[66] That is his general relationship to English Renaissance drama. That Seneca had so little influence as a thinker is due either to the fact that his mind was only thinly represented in his plays or that his philosophy was of little interest to his imitators.[67] This, however, is not the case for Jonson. In Sejanus he designed an action which refused to conform to "poetic justic". Yet there was a metaphysical undercurrent accompanying insoluble dilemma and waste which was related to the philosophical writings of Seneca. The larger question concerns the values making Sejanus a tragic world (leading to a consideration of the concept of tragedy, itself, in relation to neo-classical and political-historical drama) which may be traced back to Roman philosophy.

Sejanus contains an "argument" which is historical and political. I would also contend that it is philosophical to the extent that a sense of moral order must emerge out of the action of the play as a frame of reference by which the significance of the events can be measured in human terms. I have already put forward Tacitus as a thinker as well as historian. Through his style Tacitus created a perspective upon his material which pointed in the direction of the tragic. Seneca lived in like times and promulgated a philosophy of stoicism as a means of preserving one's integrity in adversity. His stoicism appeared in the form of sententiae, but Seneca did not devise a thorough stoic tragedy. His philosophy did not pervade and inform the structure of his plays. It thus becomes necessary to speak of the dramatist and the philosopher.[68]

The seventeenth century began to favor the philosopher, perhaps because the times were right for his firm-minded stoicism. The Jacobeans were more pensive and apprehensive, at least in literary poses if not in fact.[69] It was then that Seneca was reformed in the theater by an infusion of his own ethical thought. Moreover, such tragedy turned naturally toward politics for its subjects, the injustices of the political life for its themes, the struggle between tyranny and the private citizen for plot, and, for catharsis, concentrated more upon intellectual recognition and the suffering of victims without indulging in pity and without encouraging fear except in a larger intellectual sense. This was also in response to the times. It had a subtle appeal. It lacked the grand purgings of the strongest emotions, but it was not untragic. In a different context Willard Farnham said that "when Elizabethan tragedy reveals that the same mankind which has capacity for spiritual nobility must live and

die in a physical world productive of grossness and horror, it is able to raise in us a tragic qualm such as Seneca, with his shower of horrors upon men and women intrinsically ignoble, can never make us feel."[70] The stoic hero has an integrity which does not arise in cardboard tyrants. Jonson was not concerned with giving men a spiritual nobility which made their suffering the gateway to salvation and paradise, nor was he concerned with cosmic outrage and defeat. In the political world good men are lost and treacherous men sometimes prevail. When a world of such political "grossness and horror" exists, a substantial fact of civilized states, the tragic awareness emerges because that world is again our own.

Critics are not at all agreed about Seneca's reputation as a philosopher in Elizabethan England. Theodore Spencer's statement above that Seneca little influenced the drama as a thinker remains true, on the whole, though Seneca was known to a few scholars as a thinker in the sixteenth century. It is difficult to reconcile two such basically contrasting statements as Spencer's and the following: "Indeed, throughout the Renaissance, Seneca the moral sage is much more widely acclaimed than Seneca the tragic exemplar."[71] The debate is partially resolved if it is recognized that Seneca's stoicism was not much understood by his sixteenth-century readers. His philosophy was almost universally read in juxtaposition with, if not entirely fused with, Christian ideas of virtue, humility and the *contemptus mundi*. Seneca, the pagan stoic, was barely perceived. Henry Peacham's *The Complete Gentleman* (1634) is a fair example of the way in which Seneca was Christianized.[72] Stoicism was, in its Roman form,

incomprehensible to the sixteenth-century mind, according to Theodore Spencer. Religious emotions always intervened. Men could not conceive of facing a world which seemed nothing but a hollow place, with only their own resources. They turned habitually to Christianity and consolation. Such reversals occur in the writings of Stubbs, Gosson, Rankins, Green, Marston, Dekker and Nashe.[73]

Stoicism for the Romans was a matter of political conduct. Clarence Mendell describes it in its original context, the one which Jonson rediscovered in his treatment of Roman affairs. Stoicism appealed only to an intellectual class which could accept political realities. It rejected an afterlife which detracted from the importance of this world. It emphasized the views most in keeping with the Roman character. It became the basis for moral reform in Rome, thus it was the philosophy which perpetuated the best of the Roman heritage.[74] Stoicism was joined to the republican ideals, politically held in balance with a patriotic acceptance of the Imperium. It became the philosophy of men in political and constitutional crises. It was this Seneca which was ripe for rediscovery in the seventeenth century.

Ralph Palmer argues for a growing interest in Seneca's moral ideals in the period from 1595-1600. At that time there was a revival of Senecan thought which lasted for 25 years.[75] It replaced the hold which Cicero had over the sixteenth century.[76] The renaissance of the ethical Seneca depended on the currency of his philosophy with more than a few classical scholars. Professor Hunter points out in his preface to Antonio's Revenge that the De Beneficiis was especially well known and that John Marston relied heavily upon Senecan thought in this and other plays, especially The Malcontent.[77] Malevole is partly the

long-suffering victim, the stoical, persevering man and partly the Senecan hero who by patience and humility regains his throne. Senecan virtue becomes a form of policy. This means of virtuous watching, employed with some intelligence, pays off in political dividends and the restoration of right.[78] It is not quite a "pure" moral pattern since opposing traditions crowd in. But the "wise man" of Seneca struggling against the vicissitudes of the world is clearly represented. Something which may be called the Senecan man or the Senecan hero begins to appear in drama, a figure inspired by his philosophy rather than his plays. Yet in Marston one finds still an effort to develop Senecan thought through Senecan dramatic techniques.[79]

A comparison between The Malcontent and Sejanus shows how much Jonson had escaped the drama of Italian intrigue. The position of the stoic is a serious one in Marston, yet at the same time a theatrical device like the ghost and the conventional disguise (stoicism is Malvole's disguise), thus losing half its philosophical cogency. The pose is not fully explored because the political world is not fully real. Marston can adopt, without reflection, the idea that legal rights and self-integrity are enough to justify self-sacrifice. Tacitus had to consider the position more seriously because suicide was a real occupational hazard in first century Rome and Jonson took this reservation seriously. Stoicism in Sejanus is not a theatrical device, but an alternative among codes of conduct where the system and those in power threaten honorable men.

Jonson's stoic senators are tried in a world of realpolitik, in situations more "real" because less altered to fit a plot in which good is destined to win out over evil. Marston's The Malcontent is a comedy ultimately, not only because right is restored and Malevole is

allowed to act the part of the good magistrate in punishing the offenders, but because the "tragic" threat to that order is developed in causal terms with regard to plot only and not in the political facts related to history. Ralph Graham Palmer credits Marston for his use of Seneca, but not as a secular philosopher. Marston employed Seneca only where he conformed to Marston's own Christian views.[80] Seneca had not yet escaped the usual Christian interpretation.

This is even more true of Chapman's plays and the classic case is Cato's sermonizing on stoic death in Caesar and Pompey.[81] It is strange to hear Cato defending the immortality of the soul. Chapman does not manage to create a statement on stoicism free from his own Christian biases. His characters, like Marston's, adopt the stoic position in order to test the world and their own inner resources. The contest is rather too eagerly sought by such as Bussy, who defy the world's limitations in order to assert their egoes. Stoicism is sometimes a will to power in Chapman even though Chapman stands by the "Christian ideal of 'simple piety, a naked heart' and, most important, a 'humble spirit.'"[82] Cato's death is viewed as a triumph over Caesar and the only means of escaping his tyranny. It is to assume for Caesar a conscience bound to regard such a death. Political activity follows principles of its own which are amoral rather than immoral. To abandon the political life is not necessarily a certain good; men have responsibilities to the body politic. Yet political participation was a basic evil for Chapman.[83] Chapman related stoicism to neo-platonism and thus made it part of his own philosophical retreat, while for Jonson, as for the Romans, stoicism was a preparation for entering into the political life.[84]

Sejanus was not only influenced by stoicism but by a stoicism free of Christian over-tones, one which could stand as a foundation for a moral order based upon human conduct determined by political action in an amoral context. That was Jonson's contribution. It is not a thesis to be proved by identifying Senecan phraseology in the play, or by giving a history of the increasing number of translations of Seneca's works. It is the product of a reading of Seneca in conjunction with a consideration of Tacitus' Roman world and a keen assessment of trends in contemporary politics together with a strong concern for human conduct guided by a style of integrity. Seneca was "the poet of the extreme situation; the projector of the terrible moment when the hammer-blows of tyrannical force bring man to the edge of endurance."[85] Jonson builds this moment out of history. Seneca, the stoic, provides the philosophy for that moment.

The stoicism in Sejanus is to be found in the actions of characters and their general demeanor. Because Silius is prepared to die, he is able to state the truth about Tiberius' tyranny in the Senate. Circumstances bring him to the choice of silence or death, though in the end the choice is taken from him because he had been marked by Sejanus for elimination. His death speech contains the largest part of the stoic thought which is actually uttered in the play, though it is implied that his ideals are endorsed by the others. Arruntius approves his deed. "An honorable hand!" (III. 340). In fact, so natural is Silius' statement for Arruntius, that his pleasure in seeing so fine an example of virtue proven in death overshadows his sense of pity. Silius' speech is simple enough, yet it has strength and point.

Stay,
Stay, most officious Senate, I shall straight
Delude thy fury. Silius hath not placed
His guards within him, against fortune's spite,
So weakly but he can escape your gripe
That are but hands of Fortune. She herself,
When virtue doth oppose, must lose her threats.
All that can happen in humanity,
The frown of Caesar, proud Sejanus' hatred,
Base Varro's spleen, and Afer's bloodying tongue,
The Senate's servile flattery, and these
Mustered to kill I'am fortified against,
And can look down upon; they are beneath me.
It is not life whereof I stand enamored,
Nor shall my end make me accuse my fate.
The coward and the valiant man must fall;
Only the cause and manner how, discerns them,
Which then are gladdest when they cost us dearest.
Romans, if any here be in this Senate,
Would know to mock Tiberius' tyranny,
Look upon Silius, and so learn to die. (III. 320-339).

Silius expounds his philosophy of inner power whereby fortune is defeated.[86] He offers it both as a censure to evil, as a charge to the other members of his group, as a brilliant rationalization yet with a touch of stoic pride because he "can look down upon" those whose lives are less in their control and whose wicked deeds are ineffectual. It is a complex mood, but also a complete one. The study Silius makes is how to die. In death man's life is finished; in suicide it is finished as a work of art and as a final assertion of the will against the sinister creeping of fortune.[87] It is the testimony of a man self-made. There is no proof that Lepidus, in a similar circumstance, would not have done the same. But he was not a marked man as Silius was. Arruntius, forecasting his own death, asked how Lepidus had been both a "good patriot" yet had escaped the "hook". Arruntius thought he must have special arts. Lepidus answered that they were,

None but the plain and passive fortitude
To suffer and be silent; never stretch
These arms against the torrent; live at home,
With my own thoughts and innocence about me,
Not tempting the wolf's jaws: these are my arts. (IV, 294-298).

This, too, is a kind of stoic philosophy which is not to be construed as retreat. Without life there is no hope of contributing to improvement.[88] The art of stoic living, short of suicide, is to preserve oneself until opportunities for service do occur. Some men are given no choice to live by a "plain and passive fortitude". The tactics of Sabinus' captors are cunning and deceitful. Arruntius, in protest, suggests that even coughs or dreams could be grounds for death in such a state as Rome. The threats upon Agrippina's safety indicate the extremities of danger. Her speeches, opening Act IV, are full of fear as she reflects upon the removal of her friends one by one. There is no escape, yet she is firm in telling her sons,

> 'Tis princely when a tyrant doth oppose,
> And is a fortune sent to exercise
> Your virtue, as the wind doth try strong trees,
> Who by vexation grow more sound and firm.
> .....
> What we do know will come, we should not fear. (IV. 67-70, 76).

This, too, is part of the stoic posture, not unrelated to Chapman's stoic heroes who mean to test their strength against fortune. Yet, it is no willed exploit but a necessity. It is preparation for an inevitable misfortune.

Agrippina thinks that Gallus, when he begins to offer a means of safety (IV. 15), can offer only a form of inconstancy, can suggest only a compromising of her inner standards. There is no point in offering schemes or plans.

> "Or shall we do some action like offense,
> To mock their studies, that would make us faulty,
> And frustrate practice by preventing it? (IV. 36-38).

It would be to no avail since their doom is already fixed. Yet the alternative to constancy is Machiavelli's doctrine of expediency. Through flexibility and adaptability, alone, can the prince survive.

Policy, rather than fortitude, is the way to oppose fortune. This is the doctrine of both Sejanus and Tiberius. It is the opposite of stoic perseverance. In Chapman the dichotomy between policy and stoicism is as clear as good and evil. One is passive, the other active, the former is good, the latter always evil. In Sejanus the lines are never so clearly drawn. Political activity is a fact. Raison d'état is a fact and it has been argued that Sejanus is an illustration of reasons of state logic.[89] The play fixes the debate within a complex political action, a matter of being of two minds grounded in the logic of both attitudes, working out the antinomies in terms of historical practice. Where policy is vicious it is a fault; where stoicism is proud, wasteful or useless it is likewise faulty.

## VI

Stoicism and tragedy in a conventional sense do not lie easily together. The stoic hero is almost a contradiction in terms. Yet the tragedy of situation, the struggle of the resolved citizen with an oppressive regime, may result in a configuration which could be called "stoic tragedy". Jonson studies the position of an intellectual elite in a society which denies them reasonable freedoms. It is a study in political loyalty under corrupt administrations, a study in the struggle between protest and silence. Jonson isolates the crisis in first-century Rome and converts it into a symbol of the political life. There is escape only into apathy or into humiliation and guilt. The alternative is reasoned protest and death. A man is forced to become

either a self-willed dupe or a victim. As a potential victim a calm reckoning with death becomes unavoidable. The audience must be made to feel and understand the nature of that choice.[90] Stoic tragedy is largely a matter of intellectual recognition. The death of the stoic is to be pitied because of the waste, because the circumstances which force that death are uncontrollable. (These men are tragic, not because they desire too much but because they desire only what is reasonable and are unable to obtain it.) But such death raises other "meanings" at the same time; it crystallizes the anatomization of political society. It is a form of tragedy which divides the concern between individuals and the collective, a double perspective; the one concrete, the other abstract. The moral substance of the play is a philosophy of endurance which arises out of the nature of the political life itself. That is Jonson's way to a tragic experience.

The spirit which prompted Silius would remain an alien brand of courage to Jonson's audiences. Elizabethans were used to seeing Romans who were more like themselves. A thorough-going stoicism is a direct contradiction to medieval ethics. Suicide is offered in the play not only as an historical fact but as a noble form of withdrawal from an oppressed life. Jonson does not intrude with comments to the contrary nor cushion its purport with theories of the hereafter. Theodore Spencer has provided a full account of the horrible sin of suicide as it was conceived by the medievals; basically it was nowhere allowed.[91] Yet the stoic preoccupations in Sejanus suggest the times, causes and circumstances when such an act is permissible and almost necessary. Political freedom has to be of primary importance.[92] The ultimate measure of a man's life is understood to be, not his own soul but the

well-being of the state. This is yet one more result of Jonson's historiography and of his secularization of tragedy. In so far as political circumstances were changing in England and stoic philosophy was gaining in importance, one could argue that Jonson's Roman world was a projection of his own times. Moreover, opinions on the concept of suicide were also changing. John Donne, in 1608, published a work praising suicide.[93] Donne was concerned with martyrdom, a death justified for the Kingdom's sake, but these were not the received views. The Elizabethans could, perhaps, admire such convictions in a Cato. "Suicide was, indeed, one of the best ways of giving a Roman atmosphere to a play."[94] But they probably could never imagine themselves in similar circumstances. The accuracy of Sejanus is, ironically, then one of the reasons it appeared so unreal. Suicide as the completion of an exemplary political life was only of historical interest to the Elizabethans. Nevertheless, it was in this form that the implications of Senecan stoicism were advanced in the play. A tragic potential based in the political life emerged through the Roman ethos.

As a writer for the stage Jonson was in some trouble. Such an approach to death is powerful through its relation to political circumstances and human self-determination, but reservation and philosophical calm are its chief characteristics. Stoic death is short on dramatic spectacle. Moreover, Jonson did not compound such deaths, not because of stage decencies, but because one was sufficient to complete the essay. The play, with all its political treachery, is not rank with slaughter. Death is seldom discussed in the abstract. Jonson's tone is spare and austere and many have felt a deficiency there as well. Theodore Spencer lamented that Jonson had no feelings

about death, that his plays lack in general "common feelings about common facts which are part of the Elizabethan dramatic background."[95] Yet Jonson, through history, added something entirely new to the dramatic experience not based upon established theatrical conventions. Death became a political action rather than a private or heroic act, valid because death can be conceived and executed in political terms.

## VII

It was the sophistication of political thought which altered the design of political tragedy. The play had to record the ambiguities of the machinery of state. One keeps coming back to this theme. The degree to which the state serves as protagonist in the play, to that extent power and dramatic attention are robbed from the hero. An intrusion of Machiavellian elements could have been employed in the making of a villain-hero, but here too, the Machiavellian elements belong to the whole internal operation of the state. The contest is not only between one man and society but between several men and several parties. The Machiavellian elements which characters are equipped with are merely explications of historically established practices. Jonson interpreted actions in terms of the policy they contained but he did not build characters and personalities out of the devices of the Machiavel bogy-man.

I cannot see that Jonson adjusts his characters, ever, to fit the categories of the Aristotelian hero. The Aristotelian hero is "not pre-eminently virtuous and just, and yet it is through no badness or villainy of his own that he falls into the misfortune, but rather through some flaw in him, he being one of those who are in high station and good fortune, like Oedipus and Thyestes and the famous

men of such families as those."[96] For the best relations between character and action, Aristotle approved of a deed committed in ignorance where intentions were for the good. In the best tragedies there is an intention "to do some irremediable action in ignorance and to discover the truth before doing it."[97] It is more difficult to stage a good man committing a misfortunate deed in full knowledge of the facts, but it is not an impossibility. Aristotle favored it least. "The action may happen in the way in which the old dramatists made their characters act - consciously and knowing the facts, as Euripides also made his Medea kill her children."[98] For wicked men to aim at other wicked men is no tragedy. For a wicked man to aim against his ruler or against his society is a concept altogether outside Aristotle.[99] In political tragedy this is not the case. Robert Ornstein argues that Sejanus' characterization "looks back to the Machiavellian hero-villains of the Elizabethan stage" and the intrigue plot to the "archetypal plotting of The Spanish Tragedy".[100] It is the search for parallels within existing traditions which has been unfavorable for Sejanus critically. In Jonson's closely reasoned political context the wicked man is not derived from the old vice figure as villain, the character motivated only by "motiveless malignity". Jonson accepted Sejanus' political ambition as a norm for the world he inhabited and as the basic drive in the civic life. This factor became the first principle in the creation of the "hero", a carry-over from Jonson's satiric world; yet where ambition led to gross crimes it entered a highly serious realm.[101] The costs were death and the decline of the state. Tragedy had to find new rules for the creation of the protagonist for that context. Aristotle did not pertain.

Tragedy is generally conceived in some sense as a struggle of the individual toward power who, in the process, discovers or reveals through his actions, the sense of the ego in all its dimensions and the nature of the limitations placed upon human endeavors by nature, by society, and by limitations within that person. The essence of the tragic conflict may also be explained in terms of the psychomachia and the morality tradition. The basic struggle revolves around a choice whether to do the good or the evil. In that case actions are invariably accompanied by knowledge. Later dramatists in this tradition concern themselves with the anxieties of choice, the inner struggle which, if lost leads to ruin and death. Passion is destruction, reason the guide to safety. If Sejanus is forced into this mold his choice is made before the play opens; the rest is a progress toward unexpected death. It does not fit. Patently lacking in Sejanus' character is self-discovery. Even in the final moments of his life Sejanus never weakens. A stoic façade is part of his preparation for entering politics even as an opportunist-manipulator. There are no signs of remorse, and when all have turned against him, like Silius who says little once he is taken, Sejanus replies only, "Am I called?" (V. 668) and concludes with an ooservation upon Macro's insolence. This is contrary to what many critics have come to demand(following Aristotle) of the tragic hero: " ... the tragic hero must gain some perception of the meaningfulness of his action before he dies, or else we feel that his stature is unsatisfactorily limited by the dramatist and that he is not fit (sic) hero at all."[102]

Sejanus was aware of the nature of his deeds from the outset and boasted of them.

> Adultery? It is the lightest ill
> I will commit. A race of wicked acts
> Shall flow out of my anger, and o'erspread
> The world's wide face, which no posterity
> Shall e'er approve, nor yet keep silent - things
> That for their cunning, close and cruel mark,
> Thy father would wish his, and shall, perhaps,
> Carry the empty name, but we the prize. (II. 150-157)

He was angry, for him a rare mood. More often he worked deliberately and persistently toward his ends. He could be patient. He was not deceived about the nature of good and evil. In the political sense, Sejanus realized his goal, a struggle for total power, and the skills required to attain it. He is characterized by a fixed will, a singleness of interest, a lack of conscience, an altogether cynical outlook. He lived by careful choices and perished, a victim of superior cunning. He never brooded over possible disaster, nor did he view his life as a paradox or a burden. Sejanus is not made grand in his ambition. He is unrelated to Bussy or Coriolanus or Antony because he lacks the greatness of the warrior or deceived man of principle, the man who pushes beyond the moral limits of society and so perishes, the figure Eugene Waith has called the Herculean hero who is so noble that society itself is condemned for condemning him.[103] Sejanus is not to be identified with a King Lear, but an Edgar. The latter was the new consciousless man of politics.[104] Regard for history prevented Jonson from turning Sejanus into a character of humours, a malcontent, a villain monster. It is a study of the political man. For all of Sejanus' lack of humanity, he is the real character rather than the caricature.

The credibility of character may not be based on a description of character alone but upon character within the context of the action. The word "hero" suggests more than what Tiberius or Sejanus or Silius are to the play. The hero-centric drama is a means of ordering the plot by relating all events to the life, interests and passions of a single man. Jonson was not able to abandon that structuring principle entirely in creating Sejanus. Thus, the difficulty in making a critical assessment.

The problem is centered in how those De casibus traces should be read. As a character Sejanus' intransigent brazenness presents a difficulty. He is a man of position possessed by a ruinous desire for power which leads to a pinnacle of success which is least secure when it appears most sure. He then falls to a violent death. History introduced the pattern. It was moral intent which reduced this pattern to convention. It became the single most important theme in medieval history. T. S. Eliot pointed out that it was not Jonson's classical predisposition which prevented him from perfecting Sejanus, but his unwillingness to abandon this De casibus pattern of the medievals.[105] Eliot is right, but only to the extent that Jonson imposed the form upon history for purposes of urging its morals to the exclusion of other and contradictory themes implicit in the historical material itself. This Jonson has not done, especially in his recognition of raison d'état logic. Rather, to a large extent conventional patterns have bound the critic and much which is allegedly discovered in the work merely pre-exists in the mind of the reader. Raymond Williams asserts that the idea of the aspiring hero has fixed itself in our minds and that we read it into all art: "it is now becoming clear (at a time, significantly, when our own governing structure of feeling is

beginning to disintegrate) that the Greek tragic action was not rooted in individuals, or in individual psychology, in any of our senses. It was rooted in history.... "[106] It is not an "individual action generalized" but a "general action specified" that should be emphasized.[107] Individuals do not always stand for themselves alone, but for the parties and ideas they represent in the political organism.

Out of the relationship between parts comes the "situation" which fixes itself as fate for all the characters which it includes. That fate is nothing mysterious, but the temperament and mood of the body politic. The new "figures" to emerge are Tiberius the god of the machine, Sejanus the ostensible god of the machine and the victims of the machine. In a causal study, the blame is loaded upon the men who comprise the system - through self-exposure, through satire. Men in this system are not victimized by isolation or inner guilt, but by other men and the state system. It is a tragedy of the political victim which takes the place of the tragedy of the hero.

It is as though Jonson sets up expectations which cluster around the hero, then demonstrates to our discomfort that the tragic action happens through rather than to him. The tendency has been to narrow the world of the play to a concern for only one man. It is one of the "fixed" principles in the audience's relationship to the play. With whom is the viewer asked to "identify" himself? By playing against this Jonson pounds perspective into the spectator. All those Victorian critics who read to find the comfort of regeneration even in the death of the protagonist are frustrated.[108] In creating the delineations of the hero play without writing one he uses form in parody to emphasize his bitter point that nothing is learned by death, that

regeneration refuses to come about. Sejanus' last statement concerns the insolence of Macro which is greater than his own (V. 673). It galls him that such a one as Macro should overtop him, though he recognizes his superiority. What a strange comment for a man finishing a career like his. "Is Macro here? Oh, thou art lost, Sejanus." (V. 659). The significance of this comment is for the future of the state. Macro is the Fortinbras of the play. The abandonment of the hero, in fact, adds cunningly to the satiric blow.

"With the passing away of the Elizabethan stress on character, ... there has been a tendency toward dramas lacking any apparent hero or heroes, where the tragic action and the tragic atmosphere spring rather from the conflict of diverse characters, none of which is a central figure, or from the social forces surrounding those characters."[109] Allardyce Nicoll describes a new type of play which is the "tragedy of a system" built upon the interplay of social conventions, "abstract forces which move over and around the dramatis personae."[110] It was the result of the desire to treat broader social and political problems on the stage, class, socialization and the group, a tendency which never really established itself firmly in the theater until after the French Revolution. A necessary prerequisite was the subordination of the personality character to the matters of history and the body politic.[111] Sejanus is concerned with the survival of men representing a class, an attempt to deal with abstract and collective principles on stage. According to Nicoll this is a technique almost never employed by Shakespeare.[112] Again the uses of history made the difference between these two conceptions of the tragic fable and the protagonist.

## VIII

History, undigested, is hardly art because it lacks the sense of design, the coherence in the fable which is essential. A plot implies fore-knowledge, a sense of direction and purpose in the author's mind. Plot from history is a matter of adjustment of the materials in retrospect, though the truth of history need not be violated in the process. It is, however, almost invariably weighted and interpreted. Jonson found in Tiberius and Sejanus many figures at once: rightful ruler and corrupt counsellor, tyrant and minion, a contest between knaves equally matched in a power struggle which made oppression its waste-product. History suggested not one but several patterns of action and morality, some possessing more conventionalized developments than others. A valid historical assessment required that the balance between political patterns, such as they existed in relation to one another in history, had to be preserved. Therefore, the dividing line between the inspiration of historical events toward the rediscovery of dramatic forms and the inspiration of traditional literary patterns is difficult to define. The relationship between the two has always been confessed. Where history revealed a will to revenge, conventional forms with corresponding morals stood ready-made into which the particular facts could be cast. Jonson reverifies the usefulness of those forms in an historical context by preserving the relationships between "kinds" of political acts, thereby revitalizing the links between history and dramatic conventions. The integrity of history caused the roles of conventionalized plot structures to be de-emphasized.

The pivotal point in the plot, as in history, is Tiberius' decision to stop Sejanus' advancement, a matter of politic timing.

As plot, this reversal receives special attention. Two long interviews, the first with Sejanus in Act II and the second with Macro in Act IV, are the significant moments. Jonson weights them dramatically. In the first, Tiberius effects his will to rid himself of Agrippina's followers through Sejanus and in the second, Sejanus through Macro. All else follows from these two meetings. Jonson supplies, here, the origins of that concentrated scheming which are implied in the events narrated by Tacitus. These interviews are calculated for inspection rather than for emotional effect or bids for the audience to take sides.

Intensity of plot is based upon Tiberius' calculated but mysterious delays. Even Arruntius is finally baffled. Only Lepidus senses the plan while the others think Rome is virtually lost (IV. 446-473). Thus, what is really a matter of policy, appears as a suspense-winning dramatic technique. From a political point of view, Tiberius had to wait until Sejanus finished the work he desired but could not do himself. Then, because Sejanus had built so much popular support, Tiberius could risk no open confrontation. He had to use indirect means to build a case against him in the eyes of the mob. They would complete his work for him and take the blame. Arruntius could not believe Tiberius had such a scheme because in his own simple forthright mind he assumed that Tiberius would work more directly, take "a nearer way", come back to Rome and "cut his throat by law" (IV. 476-77). Tiberius was afraid. To return would be to risk showing that fear. We observe as Macro prepares the end. Those in the play watch as Sejanus' power mounts. Sometime later when the final meeting of the Senate is called, Arruntius observes bitterly that they had better be careful to praise Sejanus who was allegedly to be honored with the

"tribunicial dignity".

> Now, Marcus Lepidus,
> You still believe your former augury?
> Sejanus must go downward? You perceive
> His wane approaching fast?
>
> Lepidus. Believe me, Lucius
> I wonder at this rising. (V. 436-439)

At last all are deceived by Tiberius' brilliant plan. As a plot, the political contest continues long beyond the point that the audience thinks it must break. At Spelunca, by that lucky opportunity Sejanus has to protect Tiberius from the falling rocks, he gains a stay of execution without knowing it. Agrippina observes that an accident with those results has the power to fall on them "And bury whole posterities beneath them." (IV. 62). So firmly did Sejanus appear to hold the power that the audience is amazed by the ease with which Tiberius turned the entire populace against him; yet in rescrutiniz-ing the transaction, the account Jonson has provided is credible at every turn. A parallel is to be drawn with Jonson's comic plots in which he delays reversals long after the audience is certain that disguises must break down, as in Epicoene. Meanwhile, with every new device, (Volpone's first escape from the law or Faces brilliant manipulations), Jonson dazzles his audience with technical bravado. Jonson finds a similar kind of dramatic order in the policies which Tiberius follows for his survival. He is the master craftsman as he was in history; his passive role is at the heart of his cunning, a difficult color to cast in a bright hue. Thus, in the historical encounter and calculated delays of history Jonson finds a plot which is both historical yet possesses a unity and coherence of its own. Jonson manages to make history appear like art without major revisions. Policy itself, becomes plot.

## IX

For Minturno, to speak of ideas is to speak of sentence. To speak of ideas is to speak of that "part which is concerned entirely with speech." These must be clear, yet ornamented, and well fitted to what is narrated. Sentence is not anything which is thought, but a statement specifically prepared, gravely uttered by an authority directing men generally toward wise courses of behavior.[113] Sentences form part of an argument, usually its beginning or its conclusion, summarizing its essence in a small space. Traditionally such sayings are appropriate for the aged and if a revered senex can be introduced, the better for the presentation of them on stage. Sentences are a shortcut to characterization. They show the "disposition and tendency of the mind, and the qualities and appetite of the man who speaks .... "[114] It is almost a dramatic rule that good men speak good advice, bad men evil, unless irony is intended in order to reveal cunning and deceit, as the case is with Tiberius. Tragedy is the genre for which sentences are most suited. It is the art of reprehension, blame and admonishment. Seneca, a chief practitioner of this kind of art, sprinkled his texts with maxims and proverbs introduced both as reflections upon the moment and as general instruction. But Seneca was often too much the writer of moral sententiae. Action was separated from whole sections of independent commentary. In making general statements Seneca went too far and lost sight of the individual.[115] Such material was yet to be encompassed by the dramatic action.

Jonson also subscribes to the theory that "fullness and frequency of sentence" is central to the office of a tragic writer. A drama of sentence, however, is not easily reconciled to a drama of history.

Thought in Jonson arises from a contemplation of the total situation. In that I think Eliot is right and that Jonson achieved this perhaps better than he knew.[116] J. W. Cunliffe remarked that Jonson "made his reflections arise naturally from the situation or the character of the speaker."[117] Almost never do we suspect that Jonson has manipulated a situation or specially devised opportunities to introduce tid-bits from hisstock of reading into the play. Seldom do these sentences stand out on the page as though Jonson were saying, "this is what the play is about." Sentence is a technique of satire with Jonson rather than a straight forward didactic measure. Almost everything is processed through irony.

Sentences in Jonson's play are included in the political speeches which are themselves imitations of political rhetoric simultaneously indicative of a person's character and intentions. The rhetoric of political encounter seldom ceases. Most of the summary wisdom appears so buried in the speeches that it is difficult to identify it as such. Macro is a figure unlikely to provide moral admonitions. In a soliloquy following his commission to take Sejanus down, he reflects upon his amazing good fortune.

> I will not ask why Caesar bids do this,
> But joy that he bids me. It is the bliss
> Of courts to be employed, no matter how.
> A prince's power makes all his actions virtue.
> We, whom he works by, are dumb instruments,
> To do, but not enquire. His great intents
> Are to be served, not searched. Yet, as that bow
> Is most in hand whose owner best doth know
> T'affect his aims, so let that stateman hope
> Most use, most price, can hit his prince's scope.
> Nor must he look at what or whom to strike,
> But loose at all; each mark must be alike. (III. 714-725).

It is an extraordinary construction. Reading it is like viewing a mobile sculpture. The figure on the paper turns according to the perspective emphasized by theeye. Macro's words follow in clear

discursive sequence, yet each statement, taken in isolation may be read as a perverse maxim of state. The speech continues in the same manner for some 24 lines more. Macro is full of advice to himself. "The way to rise is to obey and please." (III. 735). In this sense the play is indeed, full of sentence. Yet there is no sense in which Jonson intends the audience to mark Macro's words as literal moral guidance. These are the rationalizations of a complete opportunist. Macro's extremes make this clear. He would "remove a wife" from his "warm side, as loved as is the air" (III. 725-29), ruin his parents or his kin in order to rise. The satire cannot be missed. It is even bolder than Volpone's celebration of his gold, as the "best of things: and far transcending/All stile of joy, in children, parents, friends/Or any other waking dreame on earth." (I. i. 16-18).[118]

Sejanus' use of concealed maxims in his conversations with Tiberius are similar. He uses common proverbs, "thunder speaks not till it hit" (II. 205) for rhetorical effect, but the ones he seems to improvise on the spot are more deadly. "The prince who shames a tyrant's name to bear,/Shall never dare do anything but fear." (II. 178-179). Arruntius, on the other hand, uses them far less than we think he should. Arruntius' speech is more impulsive. He still carries Jonson's satiric invective in its most heated form and his wisdom, though seldom profound, is compelling. Arruntius is totally Jonson's creation. In speaking of Drusus, Arruntius observes: "A riotous youth,/There's little hope of him." (I. 106-107). Taken alone it nearly forms a maxim, but this is to urge a case. I think Jonson is careful to keep Arruntius from making too many pre-formulated and deadly accurate observations. A sermon is not his intention but an

action concerned with the ambiguities of the political life in which Arruntius, the alleged chorus leader, is himself involved, threatened and baffled. In such a way sentence serves the play of situation, contributes to the satire, and to the logical structuring of the speeches. It is not didactic or ornamental in Jonson; again an old convention is employed for Jonson's own dramatic purposes. Sentence, as Minturno used the word, barely applies.

The complexities of government cannot be revealed in sentences. They lack the necessary powers of qualification. Such tragedy must take up patterns of universalized political actions which reveal the paradoxes of power, the morality of power, law, rebellion and loyalty, realpolitik, freedom and censorship. These shape the rhythms of the play and together make up the total statement. It is by thematic plotting that Jonson is able to build into the work what Yeats has called "the emotion of the multitude" without resorting to rhetoric, sub-plot or chorus.[119] In Shakespeare, sub-plots parallel the main as shadows to a figure. One learns by comparison, deduction. Jonson, following Tacitus, heaps up like events and creates an understanding by supplying the necessary materials for induction: compound abuses of the law, breaches of trust, examples of cunning diplomacy, a sequence of ambitious practitioners illustrating how the total society is affected by Sejanus' power quest. Jonson had to condense Tacitus' weighted, narrative sequences into representative episodes.

X

John Palmer said that "Jonson had so great a reverence for historic truth that it blinded him to the fact that truth of history and the truth of dramatic art are not coincident."[120] A politician

on the stage was a rare figure. He was either a king or warrior or else a burlesqued and oversimplified caricature. The negotiations, orders and counter-orders of the bureaucrat are more dramatically demanding. Jonson looked for the foundations of the tragic in his own culture and found it in the general political order driven by ambitious men and their petty followers. History and tragedy can be joined when the directions of civilization and the directions of the human spirit are still associated as part of a single order. As the strain increases between them, a sense of the tragic continues to arise. Tragedy becomes a response to social disorder seeing the movements of the organization in relation to qualities of mind and spirit. Such art inclines toward the art of revolution because the failures of society become the theme; yet, Sejanus is not a revolutionary play because it excites no group protest. Its respectability as art depends upon this balance. Though incensed by the ambition which corrupts societies, Jonson's republicans do not advocate an attack upon the system. They see from many sides at once and recognize that anarchy is no alternative to tyranny. Jonson, in the total design of the action, never suggests it. He does not hint of a republican conspiracy (Agrippina is open to interpretation) or of other means of escaping responsibility. It is this well-argued lack of alternatives which makes the play tragic. Where there is recourse in rebellion, the same frustration in knowledge does not occur.

Running through this thesis is the theory that the Jacobean period advanced a new mood differing significantly from the Elizabethan. To be sure, for every statement of this kind there is a counter-statement supporting a continuity between them. The seventeenth century bears evidence of a society still founded upon medieval ideals. But at

least one could argue that new ideals and new conditions forced themselves upon the consciousness of the intelligentsia and that England under the Stuarts entered a new political phase, that economic activity resulted in a bustling city life which brought with it the corruptions of affluence. F. P. Wilson characterizes the age as one generally concerned with moral and political questions. It was interested in the "mysteries and perturbations of the human mind. Next to the moralists of the Silver Age - and especially Seneca, Tacitus, and Plutarch - the writers whose works were most congenial to the new age were men like Machiavelli, Francesco Guicciardini, Bodin, Montaigne, Cardan, Lipsius, Montaigne, Charron ...."[121] The list is nearly a review of names mentioned in earlier chapters. These were the leading stoics, skeptics, rationalists, naturalists and political historians of the age. Sejanus, as history, reflects the spirit of the intellectual tradition which Wilson calls "Jacobean". The play, I would contend, was an attempt to update drama not only theatrically but intellectually. The test for the tragedian was in building a tragic sense of life out of the new skepticism. The switch from optimism to a more pessimistic outlook may be due to growing threats of a strong central government, corruption in the civil service, literary phenomena such as the melancholia movement, threats of religious schism, the new science's challenge to the old order, the reaction against sentimentalism and nostalgia, the growth of satire, the growth of censorship and the suppression of certain writings and plays, a general sense of fear in the government itself which led to a surpressing of political activities, the nucleus of a class of political victims, or perhaps to the peculiar genius which belonged to a few men. Whatever the cause, Sejanus turns upon political and moral questions with a high degree of earnestness.

Jonson thus abandons lawless, exuberant splendid heroes for realistic ambitious, political non-heroes, men more closely related to the practice of social ambition and greed in Jacobean times. The drama of ritual turns to one of satire. The spirit of the Jacobean is "Jonson anatomizing the humours of men and the deformity of the times with constant courage and contempt of fear ...."[122]

## XI

"The spoken word is the strongest element in Jonson's stagecraft."[123] It is a fact regretted by many of his critics. But given Jonson's subject there was no alternative. The satire is couched in the language; the explication of policy depends on the relationship between words and actions. Language becomes a total environment. The major issues are given out by men in confrontation with one another. The final reversal for Sejanus is brought about by a long and cunningly worded letter. The contest between Sejanus and Tiberius is largely a contest of verbal management. For duplicity, Tiberius is the master, confidently giving away those powers which he knows will be restored to him by "popular" acclaim, thus increasing the appearance that he ruled by universal consent. Cordus, too, is a legalist and knows how to turn the law and the rhetorical advantages it covers to advantage without enraging the opposition. Every speech is calculated to manipulate toward ends often against the listener's own will. Such is the nature of political rhetoric. An inability to understand both the words and the motives they disguise, leads to political defeat or death. Language and survival become closely connected. Of no play by Jonson may it be more truly said, "would

you were come to heare, not see a Play./Though we his Actors must provide for those,/Who are our guests, here, in the way of showes,/ The maker hath not so; he'ld have you wise,/Much rather by your eares, then by your eyes."[124] Jonson was aware of the complaint but made no apologies. This use of language is an imitation of political speaking. It is often a rhetoric of understatement not suited to bombast. Such an imitation also prevents language from breaking up into brilliant fragments. It moves with a concerted intensity from beginning to end, following the decorum of the forum. There, the languageof politics may be viewed as theme in the play. The closet drama again suggests itself here to some purpose since in the plays of Greville and Daniel there was a freedom from the creation of spectacle so that this language of political exchange could be more fully developed. Policy through language and thus the politic use of language, itself, becomes theme in their plays as in Sejanus. It is not an excuse for or the replacement of action; it is the action and spectacle.

## XII

Death separates crime from folly; it is the distinct mark of tragedy and "of all experiences death has the highest emotional potential."[125] In Sejanus the protagonist dies. For an audience of justice-seekers this can only be right. Yet the manner of his death comforts little as punishment for his treacheries. Sejanus shows no remorse. He faces death with the same stoic courage to be found in Silius or Sabinus. He does not feel the sting of punishment. Certainly there is no elegaic mood; Arruntius cautions against pity (V. 897). At the moment of Sejanus' crisis Jonson moves the focus of the play to

the mobs. References are made to the heavens, but that the mob's perverse delight is "fortune", Jonson never mistakes (V. 702-708). The play continues, even in the denouement, to concentrate upon public issues and public behavior. Even Apicata's lament is half directedat those who had joined in Sejanus' crimes and went unpunished. Apicata is a Roman, capable of furious gesture and rhetoric. The audience is kept away. There is no pathos or sentimentality. Hyperbole becomes intentional ornament in the messenger's report of her (V. 862-875). The "justice" of the whole final scene is only a form, the return to the status quo an illusion. In following such a course, it would seem that Jonson has thrown away his best opportunities for developing a tragic sense of death, a sense of personal catastrophe and waste.

Death, in Sejanus, is the dividing line between life as an opportunity to shape one's immortality, and the fate of having to let one's reputation rest upon that which has already been achieved. The quest for immortality is one of the strongest motivations for political activity. Sejanus struggles not only for power but for fame. The manner of his death, hacked by the fickle mobs, deprives him of all his reputation.

> Cotta. Let all the traitor's titles be defaced.
>
> Trio. His images and statues be pulled down.
>
> Haterius. His chariot wheels be broken (V. 697-99)

By contrast Silius chooses a course of life which will, in death, guarantee his good reputation in the eyes of posterity.

> Arruntius (Aside) My thought did prompt him to it. Farewell, Silius!
> Be famous ever for thy great example. (III. 342-43)

The original statement of this theme is offered by Tiberius.

> Only a long,
> A lasting, high, and happy memory
> They should, without being satisfied, pursue.
> Contempt of fame begets contempt of virtue (I. 499-502).

In short, men are motivated to the good because their immortality is measured by the opinions of those who survive them. This statement offered by a Tiberius is full of irony. He sought his own immortality by policy and by producing effects rather than true justice. His pique throughout life was that the times were against his easy achievement of fame. It is by no means to be assumed that he who condemns virtue loses fame. Jonson pursues that irony. Politics and immortality become closely related. In this muted tone the quality of life, measured by the circumstances and ramifications of death, keeps the concept of death central to the play. The satiric mode takes its effect. Death, contrary to the usual tragic pattern, is no guarantee of order to come. History does not follow the patterns of ritual. Real death, in history, transpires at the level of political bargaining. Silius' death is the ultimate gesture of political protest. Meanwhile, Tiberius feigns disappointment that he has been deprived of a chance to show leniency. Once dead, even a "traitor" deserves his praise (III. 344-47). The "sad accident" of death becomes brilliant irony in the play. Men, in the play, must die with no more nor less significance than they did in history if the irony is to stand.

Jonson is concerned with the relationship between death and the political society and not with its personal and spiritual dimensions. The primary and perhaps insoluble question is whether such a treatment of death can ever be tragic. Some have insisted that it can never be so and have even suggested that Jonson lacked the innate qualities of the tragedian.[126] Because of the emphasis upon society and the

collective, because of the close sense of political causation as opposed to the stars, because of the muted rhetoric controlled by realism and history, and the philosophy of calculated odds and resignation and because of the cunning unidealised ambitions of all the parties, the individual loses stature. He makes the conditions of his own defeat and arrives there, not by chance, but by a self-conscious game of power seeking unaccompanied by high-minded self-rationalization and self-deception. Jonson's use of history and Jonson's satirical and moral intentions, his detached point of observation, his cool control of characterization and decorum, his sense of the political argument have given the play a wholly modern atmosphere. Death itself once the emotional center of tragedy, is reduced to political reality. Nevertheless, death is the fact which establishes the import of political conditions.

XIII

It is easy to point out satiric elements in the play. Silius and Sabinus remark the corrupted natures of Sejanus's followers who can "lie,/Flatter, and swear, forswear, deprave, inform,/Smile, and betray; make guilty men; then beg/The forfeit lives to get the livings; ... " (I. 27-30). There are Arruntius' complaints throughout, pointing to the excesses of his own class (I. 86-104), or to the debaucheries of Tiberius (IV. 373-409), or to Sejanus' devious climbing (I. 212-216), or to the gullibility and doormat-like qualities of the Senate (V. 506-511). The falsehoods and treacheries of flatterers and informers, the mobs, the Emperor, the Senate, are

exposed through ir,ate comment or through ironic implications in words and deeds themselves. These exposures culminate in a picture of a society totally corrupt, spy-ridden, ambitious, proud, lustful, devious. Jonson's political world is a hardened version of the fair or the alchemist's shop. "hen all this amounts to true and literal history, the irony is complete. Jonson went out of his way to create these satiric thrusts, though as the play progresses, history is perfectly suited for establishing this effect. Thus, the revolution in historiography bears a close relationship to the rise of "satiric" tragedy.

Jonson's pessimism emerges from a narration of events "as they were". It is not a pre-arranged doom; there is no principle which holds that decay is the only force at work in the univer.e. Jonson is not concerned with chaos in the spheres or the world out of joint as the premises to human existence. This is too easily the product of rhetorical posing. Chaos emerges from the viciousness of human nature and the imperfections of political and constitutional systems. Men are thereby held responsible for their own political and moral failures.

Plot as history possesses inevitability to the extent that events follow naturally from their causes and causes are based upon the nature of political systems, human ambition and the established principles of social and political morality. The plot is "possible" because it is historical. But where those principles of cause and inevitability are universalized, whole social systems and all of human nature are implicated. The morally symbolic plot makes what has happened a description of what will happen. Society in Jonson, remote and

archaeological, is yet more familiar and immediate in terms of its thematic implications. That Jonson has doomed society, for satire's sake, to suffer by dint of its own paradoxes and contradictions is his final bid for moral instruction and a first bid for an imitation of reality that reveals an "absurd" situation. Uppermost in the value system of the play is the sense of waste, injustice, frustration, the prevalence of Macro, the maintenance only of a status quo, the lack of escape for the innocent and of punishment for the guilty, the predominance of policy both as a force for good as for evil (in so far as evil roots out evil in the play) and the temporary befuddlement of even the best minds.[127] These are more than local carpings. They form a consistent mood, a vision which, if it is not tragic, replaces it with something equally serious for which Jonson had no other term. It is serious enough that man is trapped by his own political institutions allowing neither freedom in life nor heroism in death. One is asked to contemplate not death alone, but the relationship between regimes, systems, and death in a political context. A new seriousness emerges from a closer scrutiny of death in relation to modern society pointing outward to a consideration of cyclic patterns of history, governmental instability, the unavoidability of tyranny, the role of the patriot under persecution. The satiric sequences which lead to an "inverted" world order are the same which produce this awareness of the tragic.

Tragedy "may not give definitive answers; both final pessimism, and final optimism, contradict the nature of tragedy as an imitation of life."[128] Jonson went too far in his logistics of causation to preserve that balance. It was spleen which led to the loss of the tragic; Jonson cared too much about the causes which lead to death.

In emphasizing causes he evaded a sense of release, of resolution, reaffirmation which balance hope and dread. Karl Jaspers has said, "these tragic visions and perspectives contain a hidden philosophy, for they lend meaning to an otherwise meaningless doom."[129] It is this "meaningless doom" which Jonson could not abandon by asserting a final stance of justice in injustice or of reconciliation even in death. Jonson pays no service to "poetic justice", provides no clear case of crime and punishment, virtue and reward. The symbol of chaos remains complete in itself yet terrifies because it is true history. Such is the mood, rooted in history, which makes Sejanus a tragedy of the "absurd" situation.

In Troilus and Cressida, "as we watch these passions, ideas, and achievements annihilate each other with no promise of compensation or solution, we fall more and more into agreement with Thersites, the showman who is ever at hand to point the futility, the progressive cancelling out to negation." Shakespeare is concerned with a protagonist who looks into a world come to its end, where "emotional, intellectual, and moral values resolve alike into futility."[130] This play approaches Jonson's in terms of a pessimistic negation fixed in the logic of its plot. To make those implications complete, Thersites, the acrid observer, stands by to draw the proper conclusions. Arruntius serves Sejanus in a similar way. It is the comprehensiveness of the attack that has outrun critical comprehension. Ellis-Fermor argues that Troilus and Cressida depicts total disintegration and disruption, a theme which our age should be able to comprehend more clearly than any since Shakespeare's own.[131] Shakespeare's method of universalizing doom is to carry it into nature so that social corruption is related

to corruption in nature. This technique is still based upon the medieval cosmology. (Lear's grief is projected into the vaults of heaven which should crack in sympathy.) Jonson works toward similar effects but in terms of a comprehensive view of society itself enclosed in its own imperfect systems. Both plays intimate that this sense of doom should be extended to the world at large. Both plays, in their separate ways, are concerned with societies defeated, helplessly corrupt, without seeds of amelioration. Both have the effect of discomfiting man in relation to his cosmic or political environment. The concept of death returns once more. "Under the 'absurd' regime, the search for happiness of innocent men does not lead to a spiritual victory in spite of suffering or death, but to death 'without hope or consolation'."[132] That is the note of "modernity" which characterizes Sejanus.[133]

## XIV

Jonson has been evaluated according to the so called "rules" of the classical tragedy. It has been thought that Jonson enslaved himself to them even if he half rewrote them to his own ends. Such a system of formal regulations is one way of defining genre. Even Jonson intimates that to follow certain rules is the way to write a true dramatic poem.

Tragedy may also be defined by the characteristic "tragic action," the tragic situation - those experiences which include suffereing and death, the fall from prosperity to adversity, together with all the attendant cycles of disorder and order, ignorance and learning which can be varied in a myriad ways. Sejanus has been evaluated as De casibus drama and as Italianate intrigue drama.[134] Nevertheless,

many of the conventional elements have been found wanting. This approach to the definition of tragedy is useful only if the definition of the characteristic tragic situation is broadened. The tragic action for Jonson is founded upon the struggle between knavish ambition and civil liberties. Jonson does not speculate upon the causes of an impulsive and deep-seated greed for power. He accepts such ambition as a fact of human nature. His study is the effect of that greed upon the society and how it waxes or wanes, depending upon the ability of the due processes of law to function with it or against it. It is a tragic action because of the injustices done to the innocent. A new definition of the tragic arises, simultaneously, which might be called the "characteristic tragic theme". Sejanus is more than a diatribe against individual acts of policy or malice. The tragic theme resides in the comprehensive vision of a state doomed to suffer repeatedly the corruptions of its own systems. It is not a problem to be solved but a fact to be recognized, from which implications Jonson derives something like a "tragic sense of life". Nothing more is required as a definition of the tragic to the extent that Jonson's conceptualization of the impasse reached between political forces and constitutional definitions is felt to be true and convincing. So much of the tragic depends upon that recognition, intellectually received, historically founded.

Jonson, because the victim was the measure of the outrage and injustice, had to show a care that he did not turn the play into desperate propaganda by submitting to pathos and sentimentality over the innocent slain. Jonson was spare on emotional commitments either to the hero or his victims. Yet Jonson was not oblivious to the effects included in a fourth definition of tragedy, the tragic emotion. Again Aristotle has led the way with his terms, "pity and fear". Jonson dealt in other

emotions. The play is not a static portrayal of a single mood but a sequence of reactions ranging from anger to resignation all of which must be displayed as part of a delicate and poised response to the maze of political deceits. No single posture will serve. Even Arruntius, resolved in his purpose to do good for the state, alternates between rage and time-serving, between certainty and ignorance, protest and silence, desperation and resignation. This progression of responses exercises the political judgement of the viewer, reflecting upon the historical situation. The tragic experience is created by an effort in rational assessment in the mind of the viewer contemplating necessity without alternatives, corruption without escape.[9] Failure to experience these tragic emotions is a failure of the viewer to perceive the inevitable in the situation and the measure of its verisimilitude. There is a sense in which Jonson is challenging the capacities of his audience, even defying them. Such a work condemns the audience because in so far as that work is solidly based upon human realities it points out the deficiencies in those who have failed to recognize them. It is a satiric play which makes failure a part of its own devastating satiric logic. Jonson was determined that none should escape it. The risk is ever that the audience may condemn the play, but Jonson scorned the critical powers of those same mobs in his theater which, in Rome, would have crowned Sejanus. "The commendation of good things may fall within a many, their approbation but in a few; for the most commend out of affection, selfe tickling, an easinesse, or imitation: but men iudge only out of knowledge. That is the trying faculty."[135] In the theater the majority may prevail, but majority has seldom to do with quality.

## XV

Jonson has shown an almost unique concern for the victim of political activity. Sejanus' power climb has tragic results because each gain is at another's cost. Sejanus mounts through a system whose imperfections he can manipulate to his own ends. For those unable to oppose him, such oppression becomes fate. It is not an irregular breach of the peace but a society of successive Machiavellian manipulators. Attention turns to the victim who must find a means of co-existing with the ubiquity of such power seekers. The general theme concerns survival under tyrants. This is to turn from heroics to a modern political dilemma. Heroes, themselves, become part of a larger power structure which catches them up in its own forces, both as instigators and dupes. The victim arises, the by-product of the corrupt secular world. Since God or the gods are no longer ultimate defenders of justice, even in mysterious ways, tragedy becomes a study of the victim left to his own devices. Such men can turn only to themselves for the necessary resources. They die heroic deaths in a context which deprives them of heroism or purpose except in the eyes of their fellows and sympathizers and in the eyes of posterity (who, after all, need not necessarily be more just than those who observed such deeds in life). Integrity of life style is the only meaningful course in a meaningless society surrounded by cowardice and indifference. This, too, is part of the tragic mood of Jonson's play, based upon a spirit of life more precisely defined in one of his uncollected poems.

> I made my lyfe my monument, & youre:
> To which there's no materiall that endures:
> Nor yet inscription like it: write but that;
> And teach your nephewes it to aemulate:
> It will be matter loud inoughe to tell
> Not when I died but how I livd. Farewell.
>
> ("Charles Cavendish to his Posteritie," 7-12)[136]

This was the one bare belief that Jonson could never doubt. It is at the foundation of all that is tragic, for a man deprived of his integrity is a man forced to compromise his own identity, self-respect, sense of honor, justice, worth. There is the challenge to the man in the political minority who is yet the defender of right. This crisis both personally and politically has been described earlier. I return to it here to list it as central to the tragic effect of the play as well. Jonson assumes that all good men must share such a desire and must feel powerfully for the defeat of the political victim and for himself.

## XVI

Central to Jonson's purpose as tragedian is his depiction of state, its values and concerns. It is too much to say that the body politic is, itself, the protagonist, yet what men do affects the common interest and the state suffers corporately from the deeds of individuals. Concepts of mob rule, abuse of the laws, tyranny and treason, corrupt counsellors, constitutional principles are more than background materials. Sejanus as a commentary upon state from a political point of view, has already been discussed. Sejanus may also be described as a "tragedy of state" where the destiny of a whole political community is under consideration.[137] Jonson's tragic action is located in time.

He studies, as Tacitus had done, the moment when the history of the Roman state took a significant turn for the worse. Sejanus instituted a series of events and political trends from which Rome never recovered. The play is a miniature epic history during which freedom is gradually exchanged for bondage and the struggle of a few good men from an older tradition is veritably quashed.

Jonson takes into consideration the confused principles of expediency and morality which are the rationales behind deeds for the sake of the state. This is the "thought-level" of the play. There are no moral absolutes in Jonson because the paradoxes of history, well perceived, have never supported them. Even questions of murder, treacheries of all kinds for the sake of the state cannot be condemned in blanket fashion. Yet it is part of Jonson's artistic and human purpose never to succumb strictly to state reasonings. The private man and the principles of humanitarian concern are never forgotten. There is a stoutly conventional moral doctrine simultaneously advanced, especially by such as Arruntius, so that neither self-righteous moral outrage nor reasons of state prevail.

Tragedy arises, not only from the wasting of the political victim, but from the ominous foreboding for the future of constitutional rulership in Rome and for all states which bear any resemblance to her. Jonson's vision takes in the patterns of historical rise and fall as they are related to individual deeds of rulers and conniving opportunists. It takes in the political apathy and decadence which allows a counter-structure of private greed to prey upon state interests in the name of the state until its best traditions are lost. Tragedy emerges from the fact that constitutional balances, inherently unstable, are ever in danger of breaking down where one party usurps

more than its just powers at the cost of the others.

From a more detached point of view even the cycles of history, themselves, may be perceived, cycles which have been described as "inevitable". If, indeed, they are so, Jonson places the causes in human nature which is ever greedy for power rather than in some abstract system of power changes. Thus, through his synthesis of art and history, he relates the deeds of the individual to the whole movement of government. ~~and its place in the broadest historical perspective~~. In this way Sejanus is about the tragedy of a state, an action which may be called characteristically tragic since to illustrate this in one instance is to illustrate not how history must mechanically repeat itself, but how the quest for power and corruption, the same from age to age, will affect any commonweal.

The play of state decline is related to the satiric on a broader level. A passage from Sallust's Bellum Catilinarium states the mood perfectly. "Hence the lust for money first, then for power, grew upon them; these were, I may say, the root of all evils. For avarice destroyed honour, integrity, and all other noble qualities; taught in their place insolence, cruelty, to neglect the gods, to set a price on everything.... At first these vices grew slowly, from time to time they were punished; finally, when the disease had spread like a deadly plague, the state was changed and a government second to none in equity and excellence became cruel and intolerable."[138] The tragic decline is attached to moral decline. To explicate the play at length in these terms is to flog an obvious point. The complaints against moral decadence and its ramifications for the state abound. It was a Roman theme attached to a tragic sense, insofar as moral decay and national decline are causally related. When the enemies of Rome were

conquered, Rome turned to luxury and became an enemy to herself. Jonson presented this theme in essay form in the first chorus of Catiline.[139] It was a "law" in its own right. Luxury led to vice and ambition. As Rome experienced the change from republican to imperial forms of government, the individual participants were disoriented in terms of the traditions upon which Roman society was based. That older, time-tried milieu was exchanged for a system in which the courses of state became the courses to personal ambition. Patriotism and self-sacrificing love for the country gave place to private enterprise. Community identity was lost, "the courtier ... the nouveau riche, the Cynic preacher and the Epicurian dilettante" were the new types to be found.[140] At this juncture, the tragic and satiric are nearly indistinguishable.

The gods were the embodiment of the Roman virtues.[141] The point in Jonson's use of religion is not to revive the old business of the gods, fate and the fall of the hero, but to point out the relationship between religious reverence and the values of the society. Without reverence for the gods there is no reverence for the state. The same rationale which disposes of the power of the gods disposes with the sanctity of the commonweal. Such a man depersonalizes society and thus has no conscience concerning her and no quibbles about preying upon her. Sejanus is such a blasphemer (V. 7-9, 19-23). It is significant that much of the fifth act is devoted to a religious rite. When the gods fail to honor Sejanus' projects, he overturns their statues and altars and, in the words of an advanced cynic, calls them "superstitious lights" and "coz'ning ceremonies." (V. 199-200). Society could not follow Sejanus to the degree to which he was willing to dismiss the

old order for the sake of private aggrandizement. His blasphemy represents a disregard for the common good, the birth of a rampant individualism. Not blindly but with a confident sense of the rightness in their cause, those few opposing senators attempted to keep the old order of Rome alive, especially in preserving the memories of Germanicus and Cato and by chiding themselves and the other senators for failing to preserve the old values and ideals.

The conflict in Sejanus is fixed between two generations; tragedy is in the ideational crisis caused by the changing of the social milieu. Here Jonson's classicism and conservatism show most clearly, for he adopts the side opposing change. Government begins in community interest; its ideals perish in times of private enterprise. He read history and perhaps Shakespeare's Julius Caesar in this way.

> Or where the constant Brutus, that, being proof
> Against all charm of benefits, did strike
> So brave a blow into the monster's heart
> That sought unkindly to captive his country?" (I. 93-96).

Jonson is not taken in by Marc Antony's rhetoric which incited the mobs to rebellion. Brutus' principles prevail with him, though Jonson holds firmly to the doctrine of non-rebellion and therein fixes the tragic dilemma for his own senators - more in keeping with Elizabethan doctrines. Brutus' virtues for Jonson are in his constancy and his refusal to work for personal interests (unlike Cicero, as he is characterized in Catiline). Respect for the gods is only one dimension of that total respect for society which keeps men from ruining it for the sake of their own greed. Thus, behind the play action is an essay upon the tragic sense which emerges when respect for the old order becomes the very mark by which the preservers of Rome's traditions could be identified and convicted.

## XVII

Karl Jaspers claimed that tragedy was a "code of privilege" a philosophy which "becomes arrogant and unloving; it gives us comfort by pandering to our self-esteem."[142] Conventional forms of tragedy are unreal because the basis of the tragic mood is a form of momentary self-indulgence in a fantasized world of grief which is out of proportion. There grief is ennobled. Nothing of the mundane in sickness, victimization, death is ever confessed. Tragedy is the creation of men unable to view themselves as little and insignificant, of men who cannot believe that there are no transcendental powers who must see if only to ignore their sufferings. Tragedy becomes a spectacular sort of lie which makes every participant godlike in his significance and bolsters his deflated ego. F. L. Lucas, on the other hand, came to the conclusion that tragedy may "be simply the consolation of the sheer integrity which faces life as it is".[143] He opposed that conception of tragedy which Jaspers claims conceals from men "the terrifying abysses of reality."[144] In Jonson the skeptic and satirist saved the tragedian from making this error. Through history Jonson attempted to ameliorate the inadequacies of that concept of the tragic. It was a matter of finding the unanswerable questions which pertained to man in political society. Tragic knowledge Jonson then made the responsibility of the audience. He provided few substitute experiences or diversions. It was a relation, firmly fixed in history and social observation, prepared to advance understanding. Such knowledge does not lead to a cloudy-eyed sweep into realms of grand

waste and desolation in which a single experience carries the whole world into chaos with it. This is to throw all things out of proportion. It is to confuse the part for the whole, to awaken sensibilities instead of the reason and to forget society in the course.

It is this infusion of political and historical perspective in the play which complicates the act of critical judgement. There are two approaches. One is to cite them as non-dramatic elements which have caused Jonson to lose control over his concept of tragedy, caused him to deceive himself by thinking that history is also sometimes art. The other is to search for the principles by which Jonson worked out his synthesis between art and history showing a greater openness to experimentation and to accept the play, itself, as a definition of its own form. At the risk of overexhausting a single play I have pursued this exercise in criticism in order to track down all the possible causes and ramifications of that experimentation and to credit Jonson's mind with all the subtleties of thought and composition which may be proposed upon the evidence of the play.

Drama is a particular mode of writing which contains in its forms its own limitations. To force from a work of art dimensions greater than it can bear is to deny the usefulness of the form, itself, as it has been set out by practice and by definition. Yet the dividing line between a work of art which fails by overshooting the limits and a work which practices on a broader base or reaches for more profound effects and thereby expands the genre into something greater, is very narrow.[145] The best authors have recognized the material appropriate to their adopted forms. Efforts to broaden the drama by broadening the content have usually been doomed to various degrees of failure. What materials pertain to the stage? Which to the dramatic poem? The closet drama

has been discussed because it offers a characteristic subject matter, characteristically treated. Sejanus, more than any other play intended for the popular stage, resembles the plays of Greville and Samuel Daniel in terms of their themes and treatment.

The epic, not treated formally as an influencing genre is, nevertheless, a general concept which comes to bear on the play because in dealing with the decline of a society, Sejanus also suggests epic proportions, implying in a single incident all that Tacitus meant in a long history. Jonson did not extract materials for his own dramatic ends only, but desired to show his sources in their own context, reveal the scope, themes and moods of Tacitus. He desired his play not to be enslaved to Tacitus, but to be as grand in its own way through a recreation of Tacitus' epic relations and themes. Jonson's employment of every dramatic variable at his disposal to convey that epic scope was a matter of control and a matter of stretching an audience's comprehension.

It has been demonstrated that history had its own laws and principles which prevented Jonson from reducing history completely to the forms of conventionalized art. The lines of the play are, perhaps, too filled out with non-dramatic "stuff" no matter how great a care Jonson showed to theatrical vitality and interest. Moreover, no matter how cleverly Jonson made episodes appear whole and complete, yet it is in the nature of history that every event overlaps others and that causes and events never conform to neat units. It is significant that the effect of Sejanus is based on an illusion of a complete action to be aesthetically admired, even while the political and moral point of the work depends upon the fact that Sejanus' death provides no resolution in an historical continuum. The moral

of history is centered in its capacity to look backwards and forwards without artificial boundaries. It is ever a possibility that drama is the wrong genre for expressing what Jonson had to say, that the content was too immense and intractable. There is a remarkable degree of concentration in Sejanus and a pervasive unity of tone. The play never breaks from its single mood, while the thought seems to overwhelm the action.[146] Yet it is the dramatist's task to image forth that thought. It is a challenge almost too successfully met because Jonson wastes nothing in the play toward achieving that end. Even though Jonson avoids over-philosophizing, matched set-speeches, laborious philosophical soliloquies and standby choruses through which lesser writers even failed to contribute a substantial body of thought, he may have detrimentally overextended the speculative range of his play.

If Jonson is to be appreciated, T. S. Eliot's recommendation that an "intelligent saturation in his work as a whole" is essential.[147] It is, then, easy to add that this asks for too much from all but the scholar. The point in Jonson's defense is that art, if it is to be of any use to man, must speak of real conflicts and conditions. In that sense reality dictates the development of forms adequate to the treatment of them. Serious drama had ever concerned itself with instructing in the political life. As political dealings became more complex, rhetoric more devious, power more subtly wielded, men more cunningly corrupt, government itself more stratified, art itself had to expand in order to deal with it in its own terms or else lose its primacy as the legislator and governor of human affairs. Ellis-Fermor said of Ibsen's Emperor and Galilean that it was a monumental work, full of the grandeur of the human destiny, a noble effort, yet a failure as drama because his interpretation "of the nature of man's experience and destiny is so finely articulated and so

complex that he cannot use the clear, firm lines in which dramatic form normally images underlying thought."[148] One sees this kind of complexity and inability to subordinate thought to form in all but Chapman's best plays. He, too, was perhaps too comprehensive a thinker to be a great dramatist. There is finally the fact that the author may have requested the audience to respond to thoughts alien to their own minds and that Jonson's care for history was the very reason his audience looked upon the work as irrelevant archaeology.

Yet there is always the possibility that an author may so conduct his experiments with thought and form that he expands the definitions of his genre. Jonson chose to compound accounts of political treachery until he built a full statement of men in conflict, political forces in conflict, principles in conflict and a society at the brink of ruin. Jonson desired to show the relationships between the ruler and the subject, men and the law, private will and public corruption, constitutions and historical change, and all the other themes which arise through a representative segment of history. The play is a portrait of a society which is, thus, independent of all that follows from it in terms of thought, preserving in its fidelity to history, cogently presented, an integrity of its own. This effect, I would contend, was the product of conscious choices and that its place in the development of tragedy is largely a matter of a willingness or a predisposition toward admitting Jonson's kind of genius.

## Footnotes

1. Alexander Macl.ren Witherspoon, The Influence of Robert Garnier on Elizabethan Drama (New Haven, 1924), p. 65-66.

2. C. F. Tucker Brooke, The Tudor Drama (Boston, 1911), p. 200.

3. This is not to say that they would not have supported reform. Philotas was rewritten for the stage and resulted in Daniel's encounter with the law. Daniel wrote to Robert Cecil explaining his intentions as an effort to "reduce the stage from idleness to those grave presentments of antiquitie used by the wisest nations" and to give a fair rendering of the past and of human behaviour. Quotation from Joan Rees, Samuel Daniel (Liverpool, 1964), p. 98.

4. It is not a matter of influence but of comparison. Direct influence is difficult to prove. Jonson rather disliked Daniel. His Philotas, moreover, was begun before and finished after Sejanus. Laurence Michel has shown how influence, either way, was virtually impossible. Samuel Daniel, The Tragedy of Philotas, ed. Laurence Michel (1970, a reprint of Yale studies in English, Vol. 110, New Haven, Conn., 1949), p. 27. It is more a matter of parallel endeavors, the simultaneous development of similar works and attitudes related to a commontime and place of origin. G. K. Hunter has called this a "stream of tendency" which is more important than a catalogue of borrowings proving some mechanical influence. "Seneca and the Elizabethans: A Case-study in 'Influence'," Shakespeare Survey 20, ed. Kenneth Muir (Cambridge, 1967), p. 18.

5. Roger Ascham, "The Scholemaster" (1570), The Whole Works of Roger Ascham, ed. Rev. Dr. Giles (London, 1864), III, 240.

6. George Whetstone, The Right Excellent and famous Historye of Promos and Cassandra: Devided into two Commicall Discourses (1578); Reproduced in facsimile, 1910.

7. An Apology for Poetry, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (London, 1965), p. 134.

8. Felix E. Schelling, Elizabethan Drama 1558-1642, 2 vols. (New York, 1959), II, 6-7.

9. Robert Garnier was the single most important influence upon the Countess of Pembroke's group. It was he who, with Jodelle, created the French Seneca. Garnier probably had very little direct influence upon English tragedy outside of the Pembroke circle, but he was their whole light. His themes were "love of country, praise of freedom, and emulation of the stern virtues of the ancient Romans." Alex Witherspoon, pp. 3-4. His plays are almost entirely political. Moreover, " ... there is a vein of republican sentiment running through many of his dramas, particularly in the three Roman tragedies, Porcie,

Cornelie and Marc Antoine, which was not calculated to endear him to the court." Alex Witherspoon, p. 8. This is a tradition perpetuated in the closet drama leading to those essays on the contest between monarchy and the people, treason and the fear of tyranny which appear in Jonson's tragedy. Republicanism was part of the political undercurrent which found expression in political histories. Moreover, Garnier was a man who did not take sides politically; "His sympathies are with the people who are caught, as it were, between the upper and the nether millstone." Witherspoon, p. 9. This, too, is a theme appearing in Jonson. Garnier's closet drama had a history in England illustrating, again, the dangers encountered by political tragedies.

10. Sir Fulke Greville, Life of Sir Philip Sidney, ed. Nowell Smith (Oxford, 1907; first pub. 1652), p. 225.

11. Charles Lamb recognized the political qualities of Greville's plays stating that "Their author has strangely contrived to make passion, character and interest, of the highest order, subservient to the expression of state dogmas and mysteries. He is nine parts Machiavel and Tacitus, for one part Sophocles or Seneca." His plays are virtually political treatises. Lamb's Criticism, ed. E. M. W. Tillyard (Cambridge, 1923), p. 25.

12. Sir Fulke Greville, p. 221.

13. Life of Sir Philip Sidney, pp. 222-23.

14. M. W. Croll, The works of Fulke Greville, Univ. of Pennsylvania Thesis, 1903, p. 41. Quoted in Felix E. Schelling, Elizabethan Drama 1558-1642, II, 13-14.

15. Joan Rees, Samuel Daniel (Liverpool, 1964), p. 106. Philotas was staged only because Daniel was desperate for the money, not because he wished it to appear. The play was not a success, but there was consolation to be had in knowing that "his presenting history in the form of tragedy would have a favorable response from 'the better sort of men,' now and in time to come - particularly as he looked at the 'idle fictions' and 'grosse follies' of the popular stage." Cecil Seronsy, Samuel Daniel (New York, 1967), pp. 52-53. Daniel's lack of concern for audience pleasing and his hostile attitude toward the stage remain fixed principles.

16. Daniel's plays are to be considered as plays of thought built around a political "argument". C. S. Lewis said Daniel was "a poet of ideas". English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excludin, Drama (Oxford, 1954), p. 530.

17. Samuel Daniel, The Tragedy of Philotas, ed. Laurence Michel (New Haven, Conn., 1970), p. 152 (V. 2010-2012).

18. Part of the Wilton group effort sprang from their political connections based on class. A distrust of the mob in politics is reflected in their plays. They were aristocrats who had both tyranny and rebellion to fear. The rise of a too strong central government was not in their interest. To the government, plays calling for moderation appeared like hostility against the central powers even though there was no suggestion of a call to arms. Jonson walked between those two dangers as well, careful to preserve a balance.

19. Samuel Daniel, "The Apology," The Tragedy of Philotas, p. 156.

20. Samuel Daniel, "The Apology," The Tragedy of Philotas, p. 155.

21. "Daniel displayed all his writing life a remarkable ability to see both sides of a question, and he usually chose forms which, in both shape and scope, allowed for an almost indefinite and noncommittal and non-exigent exploration of the fascinating ambiguities:" Samuel Daniel, The Tragedy of Philotas, Intro. Lawrence Michel, p. x. A contrasting opinion about Shakespeare is offered by Patrick Cruttwell with regard to such a play as Troilus and Cressida in which Shakespeare, at last, seems ready to deal with political issues in more than the conventional ways. "But the debate is curiously unconvincing and inconclusive: it ends with a sudden and quite unmotivated conversion of Hector, a lapse from his subtle and sensible arguing ... " because, according to Cruttwell, Shakespeare was not prepared to deal with the "modern" political confusion in any total way. Rather, he held nostaligically to earlier Tudor political theories positing a more secure, less paradoxical, world order. The Shakespearean Moment (London, 1954), p. 28.

22. Their plots had to be structured in such a way that these complexities were revealed. There was the challenge to the craftsman. "Shakespeare reduces all things - as he had to, being a dramatist, and as he was impelled to, being a born dramatist - to terms of human beings; politics, for him, mean the behaviour of individuals. Between the fields of politics, morals and psychology, he, like his age, made no clear divisions. Hence the uncertainty ...." Patrick Cruttwell, p. 31. But Daniel and Jonson began to make distinctions and to turn from expressing all issues as character.

23. Patrick Cruttwell describes the mood in The Shakespearean Moment (London, 1954), pp. 32 ff.

24. The Tragedy of Philotas, "To the Prince," p. 99 (ll. 107-109).

25. Samuel Daniel, "The Tragedie Of Cleopatra," The Complete Works in Verse and Prose, ed. Rev. Alexander B. Grossart, 5 vols. (New York, 1963; first pub. 1885), III, 60 (ll. 790-793).

26. "Tradition and Ben Jonson," Scrutiny, Vol. IV, No. 2 (Sept., 1935), p. 141.

27. Daniel for reasons of self defense, makes the case for Philotas in "The Apology" that the plot came half made in history itself, his endeavor being to make it "fall easily into act, without interlacing other inuention ... ." The Tragedy of Philotas, ed. Laurence Michel (1970; first pub. New Haven, Conn., 1949), p. 155. This is a factor in making the choice, from history, of the episode to be dramatized. Una Ellis Fermor states as a prerequisite that "material whose scope and shapeliness seem half-way already to dramatic form" must be chosen. The Frontiers of Drama (London, 1964), p. 2.

28. H. B. Charlton, The Senecan Tradition in Renaissance Tragedy (Manchester, 1946; orig. essay 1921), p. clxxiv.

29. H. B. Charlton, p. clxxv.

30. Alex M. Witherspoon, p. 186.

31. Ben Jonson, Sejanus, ed. Jonas A. Barish (New Haven, 1965), p. 1.

32. This was the view of Ashley Thorndike, Tragedy (London, 1908), p. 142.

33. "Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Romans," Shakespeare Survey 10, ed. Allardyce Nicoll (Cambridge, 1957), p. 27.

34. Details had to be right because of "the pervading sense of authenticity everywhere else in the Roman plays." T. J. B. Spencer, p. 28.

35. " ... it was Roman history which usually had the primacy for the study of political morality." T. J. B. Spencer, p. 29.

36. T. J. Spencer, p. 31.

38. Seneca, according to H. B. Charlton, failed to convert the old drama into a Roman voice, to adjust his forms to a new material, due to the lack of speculative and metaphysical interests out of which a tragic form could arise. The Senecan Tradition in Renaissance Tragedy (Manchester, 1946), pp. xviii-xxiii.

39. The Senecan Tradition in Renaissance Tragedy (Manchester, 1946), p. xx.

40. Charles Sears Baldwin says, "The tragedies of Seneca are so oratorical as to suggest rather declamation than acting." Renaissance Literary Theory and Practice (Gloucester, Mass., 1959), p. 137. Great figures are created only to give speeches. It is of interest that Trissino advises, in laying out the plot, that "it is necessary ... that the poet, in order to do this, first lay out the speeches generally and then insert the episodes; to lay out the speeches generally is nothing other than to note the whole action that he wishes to imitate." Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, ed. Allan H. Gilbert (Detroit, 1962), p. 216. Not until the seventeenth century

does tragedy really become a matter of composition rather than style. This is a description of the Senecan closet mode. Jonson also had to work from the speeches given by Tacitus. Yet the play is not wholly rhetorical in this sense. The theme of the political play is a study of political rhetoric. This is the main ingredient of the political life. Language becomes action in Jonson. Jonson's study is the relationship between political language and history. Thus rhetoric changes its relationship entirely to the play structure. It is no longer a substitute for action.

41. The messenger often described the violence, not as a matter of decency as the Renaissance thought, but to enhance the effect of the horror. Seneca's plays were recited and thus, the messenger could give full vivid details where there was no acting. The recitation of horrors in a staged play is a different thing. Clarence W. Mendell, Our Seneca (Archon Books, 1968; first pub. Yale, New Haven, Conn., 1941), p. 88.

42. Jonson, in following the Roman dialogues of Tacitus, avoids creating conversation out of stychomythic exchanges, terse balanced witty phrases. Sententiae came into Elizabethan drama through Seneca and the practice was augmented by commonplace books and by the strength of the rhetorical tradition. But such dialogue is often cryptic and highly conventionalized, a peculiarly artificial kind of wit. Jonson employed very little language for the sake of sheer ornament. For a Senecan imitation, Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice IV. 1, is a fair example.

43. Seneca "loves to transport us to the world of the picturesque, the unfamiliar, the fantastic, above all, the supernatural ...." which led to the encouragement of the romantic elements in the Elizabethan imitators. C. E. Vaughan, Types of Tragic Drama (London, 1908), p. 99.

44. The tradition of using mythological subjects was adopted from the Greeks. Historical subjects were not acceptable to the ancients as subjects for tragedy. Clarence W. Mendell, Our Seneca (Archon Books, 1968; first pub. Yale, New Haven, Conn., 1941), p. 84.

45. H. B. Charlton, p. cl.

46. H. B. Charlton, p. lxxvii.

47. H. B. Charlton, p. lxxxix.

48. Seneca never used historical themes because they would never have permitted the exploitation of the gruesome and the horrible. This is a crucial difference.

49. G. K. Hunter, "Seneca and the Elizabethans: A Case-Study in 'Influence'," in Shakespeare Survey 20, ed. Kenneth Muir (Cambridge, 1967), p. 19.

50. Thomas Nash, "To the Gentlemen Students of Both Universities" The Works of Thomas Nashe, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow (Oxford, 1958), III, 316.

51. The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy (Hamden, Conn., 1965; first pub. 1893), p. 18.

52. Percy Simpson believed that the preface was overrated as a guide to the genesis of Jonson's tragic style. Elizabethan Drama (Oxford, 1955), p. 127.

53. J. A. Bryant Jr. "The Significance of Ben Jonson's First Requirement for Tragedy: 'Truth of Argument'," Studies in Philology, Vol. XLIX, No. 2 (April, 1952), p. 199. Even such fabulists as Giraldi and Bandello gave out their tales as true and invested their stories with all the particulars which indicate verisimilitude. Madeleine Doran, Endeavors of Art: A study of form in Elizabethan drama (Madison, Wisc., 1954), pp. 135-136.

54. Allardyce Nicoll, An Introduction to Dramatic Theory (London, 1923), p.106.

55. Modern Tragedy (London, 1966), p. 25.

56. "Discoveries," Works, ed. Herford and Simpson, VIII, p. 567.

57. Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays, ed. by George Watson (London, 1962), I, 69.

58. Ralph S. Walker, "Ben Jonson's Discoveries: A New Analysis," Essays and Studies 1952, ed. Arundell Esdaile (London, 1952), p. 48.

59. The Death of Tragedy (London, 1961), pp. 28-29.

60. Ben Jonson (London, 1888), p. 60.

61. John Gay, Alexander Pope and John Arbuthnot, "Three Hours After Marriage," Burlesque Plays of the Eighteenth Century, ed. Simon Trussler (Oxford, 1969), p. 109.

62. Ralph S. Walker, pp. 48-49.

63. T. J. B. Spencer, p. 35.

64. The Sacred Wood (London, 1928), p. 106.

65. T. S. Eliot pointed out that it was not Jonson's classical predisposition which flawed Sejanus, but his unwillingness to abandon the De casibus plotting of the Medievals (to be dealt with later). The Sacred Wood (London, 1928), pp. 106 ff.

66. Theodore Spencer, Death and Elizabethan Tragedy (New York, 1960), pp. 68-69.

67. J. W. Cunliffe said that "Seneca's bombast and violence the multitude could understand; but they would not submit to his philosophical disquisitions." The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy, p. 59. (Jonson found this to be true the hard way.)

68. Clarence Mendell remarks upon the separate trends in Seneca's career as dramatist and essayist (p. 158). Seneca was not persistent enough in his own plays to join the workings of fortune and the stoic philosophy into a consolidated Weltansicht. It was easy enough to make fated man bear fortune stoically. It is a different thing to reconstruct the world in which stoicism takes its place as a positive vantage point in the political life. Jonson's stoics enounter not a malignant universe but a political opportunist. Fortune loses power and mystery in that world. Seneca emphasized confusion, wonder and outrage with fortune. Jonson looks steadily at the nature of political causes with detached perspective. Even so, "Seneca in his essays was a Stoic, and it is largely the tone of Stoic doctrine that gives to the plays a certain unity of atmosphere." (p. 153). Rather than external forms, Jonson looks to the total coherance of the work, penetrates to the essence of the play and takes his inspiration from more comprehensive dimensions.

69. Ralph Graham Palmer recognized that there was a different interest in Seneca. "Englishmen of the early seventeenth century ... were attracted by a moralist who possessed a finely-developed critical sense, who stood serene and aloof, who depended on himself against outer circumstance." Seneca's De Remediis Fortuitorum and the Elizabethans (Chicago, 1953), pp. 24-25.

70. The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (Oxford, 1956), p. 424.

71. G. K. Hunter, "Seneca and the Elizabethans: A Case-study in 'Influence'," Shakespeare Survey 20, ed. Kenneth Muir (Cambridge, 1967), p. 22.

72. Ed. G. B. Gordon (Oxford, 1906).

73. Theodore Spencer, p. 67.

74. Our Seneca (New Haven, Conn., 1968), pp. 52-53.

75. Seneca's "De Remediis Fortuitorum" and the Elizabethans, p. 1.

76. With the reaction to Ciceronian style came also a reaction to his brand of stoicism. Silver Age stoicism replaced it. Muretus began the movement in France, then Montaigne followed by Lipsius. Undoubtedly influential was the translation of the De Constantia by John Stradling in 1595 as Two Bookes of Constancie (ed. R. Kirk and C. Hall, New Brunswick, 1939). Jonson used the De Remediis Fortuitorum for a long passage in Cynthia's Revels as an account of the origins of evil in the world and how to withstand it. (Act III. iii). See W. D. Briggs, "Cynthia's Revels and Seneca," Flügel Memorial Volume (Stanford, 1916), pp. 59 ff. Other important writers preceding Jonson who used Seneca as a philosopher were: William Cornwallis, Essays (1600), ed. Don Cameron Allen, Essays by Sir William Cornwallis the Younger (Baltimore, 1946); Joseph Hall, Heaven upon Earth. ed. R. Kirk (New Brunswick, 1948); Guilaume Du Voir, The Moral Philosophie of the Stoics. Preface, Thomas James, 1598. This is the work which John William Wieler claims to be the origin of Chapman's stoicism, a work thoroughly Christian in mood and purpose. George Chapman: The Effect of Stoicism upon his Tragedies (New York, 1949). It is Wieler's thesis that stoicism was responsible largely for Chapman's failure as a dramatist (p. vii). Especially in Hall the Senecan mood was growing strong. The Senecan influence upon Bacon's Essays is great and a major subject in itself. But Jonson was capable of drawing upoh Seneca directly.

77. John Marston, Antonio's Revenge, ed. G. K. Hunter (London, 1965), p. xiii.

78. Howard Baker has identified, succintly, an "inreclaimable bag of paradoxes" in Seneca because he believes at once that the world is unpredictabl leveled against great men, especially, and strikes with a malign indifference, but also that withdrawal from the sphere of fortune's control, even in suicide, is a form of "stoic pride", a kind of self-isolation, and self-elevation over other men by one's inner resources. In this Baker discovers a perverse kind of ambition which, summarized, amounts to staying out of fortune's way so that, disguised in humility, one may win out in the end. "Be passive, be lowly - and thus you will attain worldly power; be humble and rule others" was central to Senecan thought. Induction to Tragedy, p. 182. This is how it stands in the abstract. In a political context it seldom results in rewards or favours but merely escape from the tricks of capricious and tyrannous rulers. Fortune, there, is the whim of a Tiberius or a Nero. It is neither an escapist philosophy nor a cunning form of self assertion, at least not in such a context as Tacitus' Rome. But in The Malcontent it is both.

79. John Marston, Antonio's Revenge, ed. G. K. Hunter, p. xiv.

80. Seneca's "De Remediis Fortuitorum" and the Elizabethans, p. 23.

81. The Plays of George Chapman, ed. Thomas Marc Parrott (New York, 1961), II, 383-86, 394-98.

82. Ennis Rees, The Tragedies of George Chapman: Renaissance Ethics in Action (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), p. 12.

83. "Chapman never forsook his belief in the essential evil of the active world of politic men." Ennis Rees, p. 14.

84. "Chapman's stoical plays - if they can be so described - followed the death of the great Queen and probably reflect the playwright's insecurity in Stuart England. It seems likely that he had general and personal reasons for the austere isolation of his writing." William G. McCollom, Tragedy (New York, 1957), p. 187.

85. J. W. Lever, The Tragedy of State (London, 1971), p. 8.

86. Silius' statement may be compared with Megario's answers to Lycus in Hercules Furens. When he threatens force against her life she replies, "Who can be forced has not learned how to die." Seneca, Tragedies, trans. Frank Justus Miller (London, 1960), I. 37. All further threats reveal a woman resolved and not afraid of death. She sees it, rather, as the culmination of her life, as well as a whip with which to beat Lycus who is a king. But there is little of the thought of Pyrrhus in Silius' speech, for death is not an escape from pain. "The merciful will oft give death instead of life." Troades I, 149. Silius was not seeking a release from the rack of this life. Nor does Silius go to the other extreme and make death an easy gesture: " ... ne'er is he wretched for whom to die is easy." Chorus of Captive Oechalian Maidens in Company with Iole. Hercules Oetaeus, II, 195.

87. Montaigne states that "there is no evil in life for him who has rightly understood that privation of life is no end." Montaigne, Essays, trans. E. J. Trenchmann (Oxford, 1927), I, 81. The day of death for the stoic is not an entry into the next life; it is the day on which a man is able to display strength and courage in the face of the ultimate moment of life. A noble death is the proof of the upright quality of life; it "is the master-day, the day that is judge of all the other days." (I. 74). Montaigne makes an effort to adjust the teachings of the stoics to his own civilization with a philosophy of consolation. To refuse to fear death makes life, itself, less apprehensive. The philosophy of Sejanus is very much orientated toward a preparation for death. Only then is the life in politics uncompromised by fear.

88. There are passages in Seneca urging the "mean," though not all are lacking in the connotations of retreat as in Hercules Furens Chorus I where men are urged to stay at home and enjoy simple pleasures. Seneca's Tragedies, trans. F. J. Miller (London, 1960), I. 17, 19. The same sentiment is expressed in Medea, Chorus II, I, 257, 259.

89. A case in point is Daniel Boughner's chapter on Sejanus in The Devil's Disciple, Ben Jonson's Debt to Machiavelli in which he accounts for the entire direction of the play in terms of a "massive intrusion of Machiavellian elements". (New York, 1968), p. 89. He proceeds by relating every act of policy in the play to Machiavelli's works assuming a causal relationship.

90. Epictetus illustrates this dilemma succintly in relating the story of Helvidius Priscus. Vespasian told him to stay away from the Senate. He answered, "It is in your power not to allow me to be a member of the Senate, but so long as I am one I must attend its meetings." (I, 19) By the same token he must speak in the meeting and speak what seems right. "But if you speak I shall put you to death." "Well, when did I ever tell you that I was immortal? You will do your part and I mine. It is yours to put me to death, mine to die without a tremor; yours to banish, mine to leave without sorrow." Epictetus then discusses the good which a single man can do. The man can stand out conspicuously and be displayed as a good example. The Discourses as Reported by Arrian, The Manual and Fragments, trans. W. A. Oldfather, 2 vols. (London, 1961), I, 21.

91. Death and Elizabethan Tragedy, pp. 156-179.

92. Epictetus celebrates those animals which refuse to live in captivity in his essay on freedom. "That is why we shall call free only those animals which do not submit to captivity, but escape by dying as soon as they are captured. So also Diogenes says somewhere: "The one sure way to secure freedom is to die cheerfully." (II, 253). Epictetus speaks of the nobility of suicide and urges it when the act seems natural to a man. The causes cited are almost always political.

93. Biathanatos: [A Declaration of that Paradoxe or Thesis, that self-homicide is not so naturally sinne, that it may never be otherwise.] His arguments include the fact that the Scriptures never speak out against it and that martyrdom is suicide for a cause. John Donne selected Prose, chosen by Evelyn Simpson (Oxford, 1967).

94. Theodore Spencer, p. 174.

95. Theodore Spencer, " ... Sejanus and Catiline are bloodless. By the kind of artistic self-consciousness Jonson used, he cut himself off from one of the main emotional arteries of his age ...." p. 217.

96. Aristotle, The Poetics, Trans. W. Hamilton Fyfe (London, 1955) p. 47.

97. Aristotle, The Poetics, p. 53.

98. Aristotle, The Poetics, p. 51.

99. Antonio Minturno says "we may widen the range of subjects suitable to tragedy and define it in such a way that whoever suffers a marvelous thing, if it is horrifying or causes compassion, will not be outside the scope of tragedy, whether he be good or whether he be evil." "L'Arte Poetica" in Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, ed. Allan H. Gilbert (Detroit, 1962), p. 293. Such academic definitions of tragedy may be found in which Sejanus may be included, but they can no longer explain anything discerning about the nature of the tragic experience. It was Cyril Tourneur who pronounced, that "When the bad bleeds, then is the tragedy good." The Revenger's Tragedy, III. v. 205, ed. R. A. Foakes (London, 1966), p. 78. T. W. Craik believed him and offered it as a definition of tragedy which encompasses the Jew of Malta (London, 1966), p. xviii.

100. The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy (Madison, Misc., 1965), p.86.

101. Sejanus' brand of individualism is measured by the effect ithas upon the society. Individualism of a reckless kind was emerging in Tudor England. "Archbishop Whitgift did his best to keep this spirit out of the social and political theory of the period." William McCollom, Tragedy (New York, 1957), p. 180. Puritans, recusants, courtiers, adventurers, capitalists, travellers and women began to assert themselves more and more in the national life. In the most noteworthy cases they threatened the stability of the society. The Earl of Essex is a case in point. When such energy combines with Machiavellian tactics, the society is in great straits. Here are the social foundations for the Jacobean "hero".

102. Charles Osborne McDonald, The Rhetoric of Tragedy: Form in Stuart Drama (Amhurst, Mass., 1966), p. 184.

103. The Herculean Hero (London, 1962).

104. This is a thesis advanced by John F. Danby in Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: A Study of King Lear (London, 1949).

105. The Sacred Wood (London, 1920), pp. 106 ff. Robert Knoll followed Eliot in pointing out the imperfect joining of the native and classical traditions. Ben Jonson's Plays: an Introduction (Lincoln, Nebr., 1964), p. 70.

106. Modern Tragedy (London, 1966), p. 87. Howard Baker concurs with this position taken on the Greeks. They did not desire only "the revelation of what the individual man himself is ... they needed a firm protagonist, one whose personal character would not distract attention from the larger matters." p. 168. The Greeks were more concerned with the typical than with the individual.

107. Raymond Williams, p. 88.

108. The sympathetic character was essential for a host of critics who complained that Jonson's tragic protagonists raised no emotional concern: Herford and Simpson, II. 127-128; Swinburne, A Study of Ben Jonson (London, 1889), ed. by Howard B. Norland (Lincoln, Nebr., 1969), p. 29; Gregory Smith, Ben Jonson (London, 1919), p. 187; W. D. Briggs ed., Sejanus (Boston, 1911), pp. xi-xii, xxxiii-xxxiv.

109. Allardyce Nicoll, An Introduction to Dramatic Theory (London, 1923), p. 106.

110. p. 107. He cites, for example, John Drinkwater's Mary Stuart in which Mary is an essentially modern character, a symbol of herself rather than a particularized person, representing a type of mind. Forces are symbolized through men in order to reveal problems of social force and class conflict. Galsworthy's Strife and Justice are two such plays.

111. The community welfare is Jonson's standard of judgement. Cicero in Catiline comes under ridicule because of the way in which he serves himself while pretending to serve the state. Jonson is continually alert to that kind of hypocrisy. The irony in Sejanus is built almost entirely upon it. Here is the center of interest rather than in the hero divided against himself. The villain in Jonson is not the enemy to himself but to society. The duty of man is to serve the state; such duty alone constitutes a form of valor. Lovell offers a description in The New Inne, IV. iv. 38-47. The ideal is moderation. Valor goes between fear and confidence. It is not rash or greedy. It discerns good from evil, arises in the reason and strives always to be honest; "the scope/Is alwayes honour, and the publique good:/It is no valour for a private cause." (ll. 45-47), Works, VI, 469-470.

112. Allardyce Nicoll, p. 66.

113. Minturno "L'Arte Poetica," Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, pp. 293-294.

114. Minturno, p. 299.

115. J. W. Cunliffe, p. 125.

116. Eliot believed that the meaning of Sejanus was to be found in the total design. "The immediate appeal of Jonson is to the mind; his emotional tone is not in the single verse, but in the design of the whole.." The Sacred Wood, pp. 105-106.

117. The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy, p. 91.

118. Works, V, 25.

119. Jonson's moral order achieved through satiric techniques and the connotations of language is developed fully in L. C. Knights, "Tradition and Ben Jonson," Scrutiny Vol. IV, No. 2 (Sept., 1935), 140-57.

120. John Palmer, Ben Jonson (London, 1934), p. 142.

121. Elizabethan and Jacobean (Oxford, 1945), p. 20.

122. F. P. Wilson, p. 26.

123. William A. Armstrong, "Ben Jonson and Jacobean Stagecraft," Jacobean Theatre, eds. J. R. Brown and Bernard Harris (London, 1960), p. 60.

124. Works, "Staple of Newes," VI, 282 (Prologue for The Stage, 2-6).

125. T. R. Henn, The Harvest of Tragedy (London, 1956), p. 257.

126. Gregory Smith claimed that "Jonson lacked the qualifications required of a writer of great tragedy ... ". Ben Jonson (London, 1919), p. 186.

127. The mob, for example, is no instrument of justice, no machine to topple the villain. The play is no simple morality play, nor is the mob simply the willful, impulsive many-headed monster. It is a tool of Tiberius' own bid for safety and immortality. It is, itself, a dupe to political tactics. Sejanus is one of the necessary occasional scapegoats required to placate their frustrations. His death was a political calculation.

128. T. R. Henn, p. 287.

129. Tragedy is not Enough (Archon Books, 1969), p. 27.

130. Una Ellis-Fermor, The Frontiers of Drama (London, 1964), pp. 59, 58.

131. Una Ellis-Fermor, p. 57.

132. Oscar Mandel, A Definition of Tragedy (New York, 1961), p. 113.

133. Jonson's motivation for reshaping the tragic vision was to find a more muscular and threatening form of comedy. Audiences had not been attentive to the Poetaster and a society which will not be "instructed by comedy is in danger of tragic corruption." C. G. Thayer, Ben Jonson: Studies in the Plays (Norman, Okla., 1963), p. 120. If an audience will not laugh itself out of its follies then it must be made to see them in complete sobriety.

134. Madeleine Doran places Sejanus with the "rise and fall tragedy of ambition" as opposed to the "Italianate tragedy of intrigue" of which the Spanish Tragedy is the most famous example. Thus Jonson's play should be related to Thyestes rather than to Medea, Agamemnon or Phaedra. The Endeavors of Art, p. 131.

135. "To the Reader in Ordinairie," "Catiline his Conspiracie," Works, V. 432. In the same address he disclaims any interest in the wishes or judgements of the many. "And, now, so secure an Interpreter I am of my chance, that neither praise, nor dispraise from you can affect mee."

136. Ben Jonson, The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson, ed. William B. Hunter, Jr. (New York, 1963), p. 370.

137. This thesis has at last received full and cogent treatment in terms of the English Renaissance drama in a book called The Tragedy of State by J. W. Lever (London, 1971) which appeared while this dissertation was only half finished. I am much indebted to his study and have, at the same time, curtailed my own treatment of the play in this area.

138. Sallust, Bellum Catilinarium, trans. J. C. Rolfe (London, 1965), Chap. X.

139. A theme set out directly in Catiline is that states when they are most prosperous tend to decay internally. It is almost a principle of history because it happens so regularly. Luxury and corruption go together. Thus, the fall of states and satire are natural associates and were so in the work of Roman historians and essayists as well. Here is a distinctly classical mode re-advanced by Jonson. He desired to reveal those connections between loss of character, loss of freedom, and national decline by studying history and causation. The question is,

> Can nothing great, and at the height
> Remaine so long? but it's owne weight
> Will ruine it? (Catiline I. 331-33).

This is true for states as for men. It is not a matter of fate or chance.

> As a state
> doth ioy
> So much in plentie, wealth, and ease,
> As, now th' excesse is her disease (I. 548-50).

Jonson's characters are political characters and in such a way reveal these relationships.

140. Clarence W. Mendell, Our Seneca, p. 28.

141. Religion was "actively satisfactory so long as the state was the end of all things for all men." Clarence W. Mendell, p. 29.

142. Tragedy is Not Enough (Archon Books, 1969), p. 99.

143. Tragedy: Serious Drama in Relation to Aristotle's Poetics (London, 1966; first pub. 1927), p. 78.

144. Karl Jaspers, p. 100.

145. This is the thesis of Una Ellis Fermor's The Frontiers of Drama (London, 1964, first pub. 1945). I am indebted to her book for this final concept.

146. This criticism has been frequently offered. Robert Knoll said that the play was a "triumph of logic over theatre" (p. 70). That, one can accept with reservations, but that "its plot is an excuse for a moral essay" (p. 70), is not a useful observation unless it is understood that the moral essay is not a didactic excressance, a pejorative thing, but that the action is symbolic, leading to a recognition about the condition of political man and thus about the essence of political life. Then theme and action are perfectly joined.

147. The Sacred Wood, p. 106.

148. Una Ellis-Fermor, The Frontiers of Drama, p. 9.

## Chapter Five

## Conclusion

In the late sixteenth century a new "romantic" drama emerged which was suited to the English mind. Not only did it provide more satisfying theatrical experiences, but generated in its wake, new aesthetic tastes, new habits of literary thought corresponding, perhaps, to a wholerevolution in sensibilities. This is to overstate the case and to pretend ignorance of the continuity in the development of the drama in the sixteenth century. Yet theater appetites and tolerances altered in favor of a drama which George Steiner has called the "open" form as opposed to the tightly structured, artificial, neo-classical drama based on the ancients. Moreover, "our own experience of the dramatic is so largely conditioned by the open, Shakespearean form, that it is difficult for us even to imagine the validity of an alternative tradition."[1] The breach between critical theories, Scaliger's, Castelvetro's and even Sydney's and actual practices in the Renaissance theater is a commonplace. What remains fascinating is the unwillingness on the part of many of the best literary minds to abandon Hellenic standards. "'Learned' poets, such as Ben Jonson and Chapman, sought in vain to educate their public to more lofty pleasures."[2] It is ironic that the degree to which they dared maintain their standards, to that degree they squandered their chances for theatrical success. Jonson and Chapman were not alone in this endeavor. They have been followed by Dryden, Milton, Goethe, Hölderlin, Cocteau, T.S. Eliot; the Hellenic has continued to maintain its hold. Sejanus is a play in the "closed-form", a work epitomizing, in its way, the "alternative tradition". As a bid for popularity it was a miscalculation of trends; as the fulfilment of a literary ideal, it has a distinguished company of successors. But this is not a complete explanation. Though Sejanus represents the ideals of the classical in its style, structure and concerns, yet these properties are not the results of a neo-classical credo alone. Jonson found another way to the "Hellenic".

(For Steiner, "It is a great and mysterious stroke of fortune that Shakespeare escaped the fascination of the Hellenic."[3]) There is much more which Jonson owes, not to the neo-classical doctrines, but to the techniques of Baconian empiricism and the social sciences. That was Jonson's added dimension. Such techniques and issues called for their own style.

Jonson told William Drummond during their conversations that "Tacitus ... wrott the secrets of the Councill and Senate, as Suetonius did those of the Cabinet and Courte."[4] By choosing Tacitus for his authority, Jonson followed a man who was a recognized authority on the practices of politicians. Tacitus' subject was not boudoir pranks or courtly manners, but the corruption of Roman government by the vices which resulted in both tyranny and senatorial apathy. The men and affairs set out in his pages were singularly corrupt. There was a brutal courage in that historian who could pursue them, year after year, seeking the causes for the course of the empire which, during the reign of Tiberius, had taken such a marked turn for the worse. In all but a few men Tacitus discovered an ambition which overwhelmed all moral scruples and concern for the commonwealth. The Emperor, insecure on the throne and subject to fits of fear, was persuaded in due course, that a conspiracy was afoot which sought to unseat him. Tiberius, at first slow to act, nevertheless took precautions which were thorough and devastating. The empire was victimized by a four way struggle between the republican senators, the prince, his bureaucrats and the household of Germanicus. Systems of power and repression were established which fell into fixed cycles. Tacitus established from the events themselves, the patterns of behavior and political intrigue which explained the past and forecast the future. Rome was caught in a power contest which it could neither escape nor endure. In the

nature of Roman political history itself, there was a crisis which could be called tragic in so far as the price to be paid for an absolute ruler was the loss of personal liberties and the slaughter of a class of men distinguished for their virtues, courage, loyalty and integrity. Tacitus wrote not only to record facts but to suggest the forces which are at work in the making of history.

From the Annals Jonson drew the major portion of his materials for the play. Herford and Simpson point out many of the variants in Jonson's handling of facts which suggest to them that he desired to make a plot which suited his own purposes - the rise and fall of a more patently villain-like hero in the popular play tradition. The tendency has been to rescue the play from its sources by arguing for contemporaneity of design and theme. I believe the case for Tacitus' influence upon Jonson as a political thinker has been understated. Sejanus is a drama of situation, calculated to reveal in its plot-designs those same political patterns which Tacitus developed in the Annals. Jonson's play is not only based on, but is an interpretation of history in the Tacitean mode, clarifying those political "truths" which are evident in the source. It is my contention that Tacitus and Jonson were kindred spirits, sharing a common view of political affairs. Both were concerned with the relationship between morality and politics. They were skeptical, advanced no easy solutions, fell prey to no alluring political visions. The effect may indicate an artificial austerity which looks like the desire to turn history into a "chiller". But there is an integrity in both Tacitus and Jonson which reflects a seriousness of purpose. Jonson was intent upon

describing the affairs of state and upon exposing the misconceptions which resulted from cliched and irresponsible popular thinking (See Epigram XCII). If their cynicism gave them a darker view of human nature than reason should allow, there are the facts which appear in testimony to the reliability of both as historical scholars. Tacitus, likewise, was an artist employing the skills of the orator in revealing the rhetorical crafts of politicians and dissemblers. In his dramatic portraits and feigned speeches he worked toward the concentration of drama and, in his sense of political doom, toward the vision of the tragedian. Techniques of characterization develop from the creation of men as political beings and from Roman psychology. The tragic arises from the events themselves. History generates the artistic processes and genre required for its cogent presentation. Not only is it conceivable that Jonson developed Roman themes in the course of explaining absolutism and its dangers to his own age, but his art itself was derived from the solutions developed by the Romans.

Attempts could be offered to explain, from the troubled events of Jonson's early life, his religious convictions, his scrapes with the authorities, the sober concern he shows for law and magisterial power in the play. Jonson lived through the times which experienced the Essex Rebellion, the Jesuit tracts, the treason trials of various kinds engineered by Bancroft and Whitgift. It was a period of debate over parliamentary powers especially under the direction of Peter Wentworth. But Elizabethan England was no first century Rome. The making of direct parallels between past historical events and the present has been the bane of dramatist-historians. It is not with individuals and specific events, but with the nature of authority that Jonson is concerned. That Northampton charged Jonson with popery and treason is not only proof that he recognized the potential

links between autocratic abuses in the past and possible slurs against the present monarch, but also that he failed to understand the play altogether, sticking at small-minded applications without heeding the overview of politics which condemns his very action. In pressing charges he makes of himself an ambitious flatterer eager to please at the expense of a member of the Jacobean intelligentsia (small consolation to Jonson in knowing that Northumberland had been magnificently squashed by a play politically unassailable if understood, when that play itself was generally ignored, yet the cause of his ensuing misfortune).

What matters more basically is the Roman power structure which allowed ambitious men to rise and prey upon the old Roman aristocracy and the few "new men" who had joined with them. The Tudor Constitution did not preclude such activities from happening in English society. To be sure Jonson, like Tacitus, could not make direct references to constitutional principles in the same way that Shakespeare could describe the chain of being in which the king found his rightful place. Such conventional forms of thought raised no hostilities. But loyalty with qualifications was no mood to broach during the succession crisis which rankled English nerves, increasingly, until 1603. Even a description of the political status quo, the ideal balance between Queen and parliament was a risky undertaking. Catholics and Puritans had placed the government on the defensive. No Sir Thomas Smiths wrote in 1600 of the virtues of mixed government. Conditions were changing and Sejanus was calculated to cast light on the developing trends of absolutism. Jonson's play arrives not at a celebratory statement of monarchy as the finest of all forms of government which the earlier Tudor political thinkers were inclined to promulgate, but that while

kings werehardly justified in their tyrannous practices and moral decadence, yet monarchy was the best peace-keeping government in lieu of any better alternatives.

The foot-dragging loyalty of Sabinus states the case perfectly. Jonson tests the old Tudor doctrines of loyalty and obedience in the light of the new politics of modern secular states and finds them valid and necessary. But government was no longer the pride of the people; it was a necessary and sometimes dangerous evil. The glow was gone; Jonson could not help himself. Hooker left the problem of tyranny unsettled in Bk. VIII, Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity. Fear of rebellion was the Tudor theme. Fear of tyrants was the theme of the seventeenth century. Where oppression threatened the process, equivalent to republicanism, found new justification. Jonson was a monarchist, but he was also a republican. It was the paradox in Brutus' career which the prosecutors of Cordus refused to consider. Brutus was a tyrannicide. He was also the epitome of Roman virtue struggling for republican freedoms. No advocate of revolution, Cordus was a critic of tyranny in light of the best standards of the past. Coleridge also missed thepoint. Commenting on Arruntius' speech, "The name Tiberius,/I hope, will keep, howe'er he hath foregone/The dignity and power." (I. 244-46) he stated, "The anachronic mixture in this Arruntius of the Roman republican, to whom Tiberius must have appeared as much a tyrant as Sejanus with his James-and-Charles-the-First zeal for legitimacy of descent in this passage is amusing. Of our great names, Milton was, I think, the first who could properly be called a republican."[5] Coleridge thought that Arruntius was Jonson's spokesman misapplied because Jonson was no republican, that Jonson had to adopt one partisan view or the other. Barish in attempting to

come to Jonson's rescue also missed the point claiming that Jonson probably was politically inconsistent because he "is not, in fact, a sophisticated political theorist or, indeed, a political theorist at all."[6] It is the intellectual consistency of the critic which insists that Jonson should have chosen, should have falsified the constitutional and temperamental impasse which makes this play a remarkable statement about men and politics and the ideological contradictions which lead to frustration and destruction. Jonson urges these paradoxes throughout: in Sabinus' speech where he states that "A good man should and must/Sit rather down with loss than rise unjust" (IV. 165-66) and in Silius' statement: "If this man [Tiberius]/Had but a mind allied unto his words,/How blest a fate were it to us, and Rome!/We could not think that state for which to change,/Although the aim were our old liberty." (I. 400-4). Silius could die for republican ideals, he could attack the monarch for his violations, but he too was a monarchist. These were the men who supported the house of Germanicus, the source for the next emperor to the throne. The paradox is in history and the nature of constitutions, not in Jonson's political naivete. I would argue that Sejanus is a precociously astute assessment of the cycles of political power and the frustrations of divided allegiance. This, above all other themes, the play advances, for which reasons the Tudor Constitution has been outlined as the cause in fact which made the political analysis in Sejanus important.

Jonson made a reputation for himself, at least among his fellow dramatists, as a historian as soon as Sejanus was published. Marston feigned genuine concern that Jonson had done so much damage to the name of historical drama with his literal-mindedness that a work such as his own Sophonisba might be pursued with "prepared dislike".

Jonson's many footnotes were an offering to scholars; he meant only to show his "integrity in the story" ("To the Readers," 25). Instead, he created a lingering suspicion in the minds of his readers down to the present that he was crabbed and pedantic, that history as a science does not readily accommodate itself to art, that he should have made up his mind between the two. Jonson's subject matter was extraordinary. De Villiers' complaint that the "extreme deterioration carries no conviction" proves how justified Jonson was in stressing the accuracy and authority of his material.[7] It was not only a matter of following the advice of the Italian Renaissance critics- that comedy should be an action feigned while tragedy should be based on actual events. It was a matter of credibility as well; Jonson needed proof of authenticity where his themes might be doubted.

There had been in the English dramatic tradition an interest in history, but invariably it was subdued by the stock of ready-made plots and by the forms of literary imitation. The Elizabethan dramatists ultimately were not historians; it is perhaps their good fortune. For them, generally, history was a form of patriotism, a celebration of past heroes, a moral counsellor, a record of past events, a means of immortality. Critical accuracy was not of the utmost importance. Yet, in the later years of Elizabeth a new school of historiography grew up which had its effect upon the writing of historical drama. The names connected with it were Hayward, Bacon, Camden, Savile, Selden; Jonson was at one time close to them all. A concentration upon "truth of argument", the close perusal of all available sources, the research into causes, the "actions, orders and events of states" are all abundantly evident in Jonson's treatment of Roman history. This

sense of the empirical method, the meticulousness of the scholar was a part of the new "academic" trend which accompanied the rise of the modern state. The "historical revolution" is undoubtedly a part of the inspiration behind the uses of history in the play, and Sejanus, as dramatized history, is an attempt to address new political conditions in their own terms.

"If he alters little in his historical materials, it is partly because history in some important points played as it were into his hands, providing both a kind of action and a prevailing quality of character singularly suited to his genius and to his art."[8] Jonson desired to reveal rather than translate history. He found there what he wished to express dramatically, half-made by the historians' own conceptions of the themes and order of history. I am doubtful that Jonson allowed a moral reading of history to overwhelm the implications of the sources. Jonson did not yield himself up to the theory that good must win out over evil forces. Almost unique in his age, Jonson preserved a hard line on the nature of political corruption and the sublunary disorder of history. Yet what he found he illuminated as Bryant has it "with the penumbra of that light the broad movement, the larger action, from which the chosen segment [of history] should draw its full significance. And in both of Jonson's Roman plays that larger action turns out to be a tragic action, with the state itself taking the role of the tragic protagonist."[9] Jonson had certain conventions to overcome. It is, I believe, a reasonably safe generalization to assume that the variables of political behavior together with their cosmic implications were fixed in the English minds in a set of commonplace notions. When the Elizabethans read history,

they saw a repetition of moral patterns. They believed that insofar as situations were analogous, men might fear like effects from like causes. But the political conventions lacked sophistication; they were always somewhat true yet badly out of date: that Henry V was a glorious Christian prince and that Richard III was an evil villain. Renaissance tragedies and histories established themselves on these doctrines. A scientific history was a reexamination at the fount, a rescrutinizing of history to see if the old conventions could be confirmed. In the reexamination (of an admittedly carefully chosen historian) Jonson found new associations more in harmony with the seventeenth-century milieu. "For Shakespeare, history was only a means to an end, a source of material from which he could fashion a fable to reveal something of that true substance which is only faulty and imperfectly reflected in mundane affairs. For Jonson, history was an end in itself; it was man's best source of truth outside the realm of supernatural revelation."[10]

The play is called Sejanus His Fall in the 1605 Quarto. In the section entitled "The Argument" Jonson outlines the action. It follows the career ofone man beginning with his rise to favor, his act of revenge on Drusus, his ambition for the throne, his projects against the Germanicans, revealing the itinerary of an essentially evil power seeker who overreaches himself in seeking to marry into the royal family. The Emperor, made suspicious, raises up a new monster to rid himself of the old. In its overall delineation, such a story with its peculiar variants, satisfies the requirements for a De casibus morality illustrating the dangers and pitfalls of ambition, Jonson's own contribution to the tradition of the Mirror for Magistrates. There

are implications of a moral order at work, the patience of the gods followed by swift, fell retribution. At the beginning of Act V Sejanus is in a surge of elation, "Swell, swell, my joys." Hours later he is not only dead but torn apart by the mob, bits of his body buried under piles of dust all over the city of Rome. That is justice with a vengeance. T. S. Eliot thought the imposition of this pattern a fault, but he did not deny that Jonson intended it. Bolton noted that the play was not only about Fortune and the fall of princes, but that Fortune rules the play.[11] Herford and Simpson would agree that what Jonson "felt to be tragic in the story of Sejanus was in part that which the whole medieval world understood by tragedy, and the authors of the Mirror for Magistrates still exemplified in their tragic tales, - the sudden passage from prosperity to adversity."[12] To the portrait of the villain Jonson added arrogance, beefing up his character, though only in dimensions which evoke no pity. Sejanus, as an historical portrait, is put aside, condensed and abbreviated into a stage villain. Sejanus fails to satisfy as a tragic protagonist. As Bamborough says, "Failure to obtain sympathy for the characters is a limitation in comedy; in Tragedy it is crippling."[13] This objection is apparent throughout the criticism of Jonson in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Once convinced of the idea that Sejanus is a medieval tragedy in renaissance trappings based on a historical source, these faultings are inevitable. Jonson could not even please those who were willing to entertain the idea of the evil protagonist. Sejanus is not great enough to be a truly tragic villain-hero. "His Machiavellian character is not complete: he is all fox and no lion."[14] This is perhaps a variant of the same theme. A consideration of the De casibus tradition is difficult to avoid, yet in the light of Jonson's historical and political interests it (~~is altered into~~ should be understood as) a structural convenience. It

is not a causal agent which must figure in the interpretation of the play.

De casibus tragedy implies justice, retribution, the concern of transcendental forces; Roman history casts all such concepts in doubt. Tiberius, a second villain, together with the new prodigy, Macro, survive to defy those principles. There is no comfort to be taken from the fall of the villain. So much of Jonson's energy went into the creation of other sources of dramatic experience: the study of political dissimulation, the moral corruption and decline of a whole society, the struggle for civil liberties on the part of a small group of republican stoics. The shape of history and politics so cast the De casibus lines into the shade that they seem to represent merely a hint of order in a political world which denies it. Sejanus, at one remove, is proof that a new order of realpolitik was moving against the familiar and comfortable myths: the gods and their scourges, punishment for sin in the form of tyrants, or even that excessive ambition will necessarily overreach itself. There is the possibility that the only true source of "pattern" is ambition, that it may not always destroy itself, that causes arise from human wishes and opportunity and that civic life is a Darwinian struggle in which only the most fit, or the most cunning, survive. Fortune is given her due at the end of the play, yet she is only the convenient personification of human confusion. She is blamed for all the ills of Rome (V. 891), as well as praised for her alleged concern that evil is punished. Elsewhere (V. 798-800), fortune is equated with the fickle, random and injust activities of the mob. Where all activities may be attributed to her, it hardly matters that any are. In Sejanus, fortune is an explanation after the fact without causal function. In the structure of the play an argument between intimations of order and realpolitik is carried out. Policy,

in the final analysis, rules all. Only those deceived or swollen in pride or incapacitated by debauchery "surfeit on blind Fortune's cup." (II. 261). It is a world without transcendental qualities; Jonson's sense of the tragic can only rise out of the contradictions in human social and political institutions, never out of the malignancy of the stars.

That Sejanus is a kind of "satiric tragedy" is a notion which is recurrent and useful. Elizabeth Woodbridge was perhaps the first to make note of the likenesses between the plots of Sejanus and Volpone.[15] Like Mosca and Volpone, Tiberius and Sejanus form a wicked entente against the Roman state, foiled only by the breakdown in relations between them. It happens again in the Alchemist where the triumvirate, operating on a truce throughout the play, finally turn upon one another. For Oscar Campbell the patterns of satiric comedy dictate the forms of Jonson's tragedies as well. He reasons that Sejanus, lacking in tragic emotions, seeks the comic responses which he describes as "moral repulsion, scorn and derision. And these are the emotions which satire in both its tragic and comic modes seeks to arouse."[16] The absence of conventional tragic formulas and sympathetic characters, the presence of abundant critical and satiric commentary, the obvious distaste with moral wickedness would indicate that Jonson carried on with the satiric themes dealing now with crimes rather than with follies.

The Jacobean tragedians turned the villain accomplice into a hero, a marked innovation which began with Marston. In the Tudor tragedy of revenge accomplices remained "tools who were disposed of as soon as their usefulness had ended."[17] One thinks of Pedringano in the Spanish Tragedy or of Ithamore in the Jew of Malta. But this

strictly functional character became more important in the form of the tyrant's agent in the more complex political regimes which the Jacobeans sought to construct: Marston's Mendoza in The Malcontent, Tourneur's Vindice, Chapman's Bussy, Webster's Bosola. Highly varied characters, yet all were agent-victims whose falls were significant to the action. Sejanus was no prince but a commoner who was reminded of his origins when his ambitions waxed too keen. Yet he was responsible for initiating the Roman terrors under Tiberius. The monarchy was becoming a less personal force, officialdom more prominent. Sejanus was made complex by the fact that the old tyrant figure was still evident, sharing in the action and the dramatic interest. The accomplice as hero was a means of accommodating the new politics dramatically.

I believe the design arose through the urge both to present the tragic aspects of the political situation and to thrash the vices which lead to treachery and inhuman abuses. These are two aspects of the same issue and must remain co-present so that anatomization of such matters as policy is not mistaken for instruction. The balance between the satiric and tragic is the result of the artistic development of the tragedy of political situation closely related to constitutional paradoxes. Satiric invective contributes to the final effect, the emotion which follows intellectual discovery rather than sympathetic indulgence, which, if Sejanus is satiric tragedy, is the only kind of Aristotelian - like response possible. Where the play world is sufficiently corrupt to make the satire biting it will be a world which becomes "absurd" when the stakes of the action are life and death. Satiric tragedy ultimately is more than scornful and derisive; it is finally hopeless. That is tragedy with a vengeance. Steiner

claims that "with the decline of hope which followed on the early renaissance - the darkening of spirit which separates the vision of man in Marlowe from that of Pico della Mirandola - the sense of the tragic broadened."[18] The difficulty is that Tacitean gloom, Jonsonian gloom, will be rejected by an age still thriving, at the popular level, upon a kind of historical myth of national election and the buoyancy of political stability and financial prosperity. Doom prophets may arise at the firstmoment of decay; it is at that moment they are looked upon as least useful. The theater was Jonson's medium, his ambition, to inform men about the nature of political power. There is no reason why the Jonsonian tragic vision should not have satisfied. Nevertheless, "when the new world picture of reason usurped the place of the old tradition in the course of the seventeenth century, the English theatre entered its long decline."[19] Jonson's play was an attempt to reform with the reforms. But theater belonged essentially to the old traditions. That was not Jonson's fault.

The Tudors made use of Seneca as a source of rhetoric, maxims, stage gaggetry, ghosts, choruses, horror, blood revenge. In the next century it was his thought, the doctrine of the Stoics, the sense of political repression, the awareness of tyranny in his writings which compelled interest. Jonson, as tragedian, was in the vanguard of the rediscovery of Seneca the politician and stoic philosopher. This, too, was a Jacobean quality which should have had a larger future in the theater than it did. It was an outlook upon affairs central to Jonson's tragic vision.

Jonson was a man of rules who, when he ignored them, thought it important to tell his readers so. He wrote as though to fulfill what was demanded of him as a respectable scholar-dramatist. The closet

drama and the neo-classical theories were ways of thinking about the kind of production Sejanus was in contrast to the so-called native traditions. The question is whether Jonson the dramatic-theorist could reconcile his views to the product which emerges as the drama of history. Ideally the neo-classical economy and singleness of purpose, concentration of plot and simplification of character, the consolidation of dramatic sequences, should prove to be the essential techniques for revealing both the elements of serious satire and political tragedy which together make up the play. But for Jonson it is more essentially in his consistency of mind, his concise and weighted style that he differs so essentially from other English Renaissance dramatists. Metaphor is a matterof logical clarification, almost never a technique for effusion or connotative enrichment. His tragedies are very much works of rhetoric, but they are imitations of the working oratory of court and Senate. Thereis no rant and ventriloquism left. There are no irrelevant facts or associations. His entire play world is calculated. He works essentially like an essayist displaying both scenes and the logic of scenes with a rationalist's control. He uses language in order to evoke mental responses and judgements inthe audience. His style and temperament equip him to drive for hard and brilliant effects both satiric and tragic. If his drama is experience, it is the experience of brute assessment.

The question is not whether tragedy should be founded upon a true source, but how close that source must be followed. At some nebulous point it is possible for the artist to abandon his artistic criteria and turn historian, seeking by the methodology of the social scientist the truths of history, organized in vaguely literary patterns. Jonson moves very far in this direction. It is impossible for the historian to preserve fidelity to the unities of time and place. Jonson

was compelled, for the sake of his art, to force characters out of their historical roles, to combine separate historical events, delete contradictory information, simplify characters. These were to be his secrets. But there is reason to believe that Jonson meant, at the same time, to preserve the basic truths and integrity of the sources and to illustrate them as dramatic truths. Sejanus is the product of his labours and the mark of his best capabilities as a synthesizer of literary forms in the tragic mode. The important factor is that he was convinced that a finer drama could be made by the marriage.

> Lord Falkland had much to say in praise of Jonson,
> "Whose Politicks no lesse the minds direct
> ... nor with less effect,
> When his Majesticke Tragedies relate
> All the disorders of a Tottering state,
> All the distempers which on Kingdomes fall,
> When ease, and wealth, and vice are generall,
> And yet the minds against all fear assure,
> And telling the disease, prescribe the cure:
> Where, as he tels what subtle wayes, what friends,
> (Seeking their wicked and their wisht-for ends)
> Ambitious and luxurious Persons prove,
> Whom vast desires, or mighty wants doth move.
> The generall Frame, to sap and undermine,
> In proud Sejanus, and bold Catiline;
> So in his vigilant Prince and Consuls parts,
> He shewes the wiser and the noble Arts,
> By which a state may be unhurt, upheld,
> And all those workes destroy'd, which hell would build.
>
> (ll. 121-138)[20]

The state falling and the state preserved - Falkland cites them both as part of the vision of Jonson's tragedy. There can be no doubt that the preservation of the state is a good thing and that princes must exercise those arts of rule which will secure the futures of their commonwealths. Princes must be the more cunning where ambitious juniors seek by the same tactics to undermine the foundations of society. Yet because of these diseased conditions, states appear to be tottering and crumbling; princes, themselves, are forced into evil

practices in order to secure their thrones. The tragedian and the satirist join. Ease, wealth, decadence, these are the conditions which invite ambitious adventurers to try their fortunes in politics. Luxurious persons throw monarchs back on their devices. A cycle of decadence, ambition, corruption, repression is established which holds the body politic in its grip. The logic once entered upon is almost inescapable. It is material suited both for satiric ridicule and fearful apprehension. Description of the disease is prescription for the cure. But human nature defies all prospect of remedy. This dilemma is an accurate representation of life; it arises from the facts of history and is reflected in the author's own times. The issues at stake are the security of commonwealths and civil liberties; the consequences "tragic". That tragic emotion is to be aroused by personal sympathies with the characters is doubtful. Jonson insulated the action in such a way that temptations to experience simultaneously what the characters feel are held to a minimum. The tragic emotions evoked by the play are arrived at through intellectual perception of the basic issues. Pity is overshadowed by the fear which comes in a recognition of the plausibility of events.

I do not think it is important that critical limits are set on the definition of tragedy. I do not think it is important to create for Jonson a set of principles which may be called "Jonsonian". The reputation of the play has suffered to the extent critics have assumed that Jonson's neo-classicism included rigid and perhaps reactionary concepts of tragic structuring, that his plots and characters were created out of the old Senecan "rules", and that the difference between them and the ideal was a matter of unfortunate compromise. Jonson's "To the Readers" is an explanation of why he did not think it mattered

that he depated from the rules. He was not merely trying to please an audience, but to expand the uses of the tragic mode through the suggestions of history, closely scrutinized. It was his own reputation as a classical scholar which he feared. The established patterns were useful to him only as guides to organizing his materials. He borrowed from the De casibus conventions, the revenge tragedy, and his own satiric patterns where they were meet to express relationships which arose from the historical accounts.

The new tragic dimensions which Jonson "discovered" are Roman as well as Elizabethan. "Naturally Jonson was aware that Roman historians and satirists found a link between individual and social corruption ...."[21] This corruption is Jonson's theme - it ranges throughout society from the emperor down through the mobs. The tragedy is one of state, of fallen villains, the wanton wasting of good men, the conflict in values between new and old political orders, the tragedy of the changing social milieu, the tragedy of constitutional imperfection and inevitable political decay and the sense of defeat which prevails once this syndrome is discovered. Sejanus suggests a number of ways in which the political tragedy sought expansion and redefinition. At the same time Jonson is determined, as a social critic, to make men live fully cognizant of their failures. A form of tragedy is also created by the satiric artist who desires to make men miserable about themselves because they have so much in common with those for bears whom any fair-minded observer must confess confounded justice and injured the commonweal through their political ambition or apathy.

## Footnotes

1. George Steiner, The Death of Tragedy (London, 1961), p. 23.
2. George Steiner, p. 21.
3. George Steiner, p. 24.
4. Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthorndon, ed. R. F. Patterson (London, 1924), p. 14.
5. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Dramatists (Edinburgh, 1905), p. 279.
6. Ben Jonson, Sejanus, ed. Jonas Barish (New Haven, Conn., 1965), p. 186.
7. Jacob I. De Villiers, "Ben Jonson's Tragedies," English Studies, XLV (Dec., 1964), p. 438.
8. Herford and Simpson in Works, II, 16-17.
9. J. A. Bryant Jr., "Catiline and the Nature of Jonson's Tragic Fable," PMLA LXIX, No. 1 (1954), pp. 275-76.
10. J. A. Bryant Jr., p. 275.
11. Ben Jonson, Sejanus His Fall, ed. W. F. Bolton (London, 1966), p. xvi.
12. Works, II, 24.
13. J. B. Bamborough, Ben Jonson (London, 1970), p. 54.
14. Clarence V. Boyer, The Villain as Hero in Elizabethan Tragedy (New York, 1964), p. 177.
15. Elizabeth Woodbridge, Studies in Jonson's Comedy (New Haven, 1898).
16. Oscar James Campbell, Shakespeare's Satire (Oxford, 1943), p. 182.
17. Fredson Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy 1587-1642 (Princeton, N.J., 1940), p. 275.
18. Steiner, p. 16.
19. Steiner, p. 23.
20. "An Eglogue on the Death of Ben Johnson, betweene Melybaeus and Hylas.," Works, XI, 433.
21. Ralph Nash, "Ben Jonson's Tragic Poems," Studies in Philology LV, No. 2 (April, 1958), p. 180.

## Appendix A

## The Stage History of Sejanus

In February 1928 Sejanus received a serious stage treatment, the first certain one since 1603. Poel interpreted the play in a rather biographically local way reading the Earl of Essex for Sejanus and Ben Jonson for Arruntius. Poel's goal was to find the original play, the one staged at the Globe, amidst all the alterations of the 1605 text. He was unwilling to add a word to the text, but he found it necessary to delete a great deal. The production was admired, "swift in movement and elaborate in design, [it] gave a rich satiric picture of Roman decadence."[1] Percy Simpson, one of Jonson's Oxford editors saw the production and praised it for its "serene, effortless and pure" beauty and for its "sense of quiet, spacious grandeur".[2] Robert Noyes claims that "there is slight documentary evidence that Sejanus was played after the Restoration."[3] But the sentence is ambiguous and no further evidence is offered. In his list of performances at the end of the book for that period, none is given for Sejanus. A. C. Ward was the first to mention that in the later seventeenth century the play was translated into German and performed at the court of the Elector Palatine Charles Lewis of Heidelberg between 1663 and 1671. Lewis was the son of Elizabeth of Bohemia and "had the true Stuart love for the theatre and its literature."[4] Briggs is more speculative about early performances and even less informative about his sources. In a note he mentions Gerard Langbaine's brief description of the play in An Account of the English Dramatic Poets which appeared in 1691. "Langbaine says that Sejanus 'is generally commended by all

lovers of poetry,' and it was received and adapted for political purposes in the eighteenth century.." Together with this, Briggs asserts even more positively that "under Charles II it was given at least one performance ... "[5] But the paragraph by Langbaine contains no mention of one and Briggs also fails to offer a source for the Restoration performance. Robert E. Knoll states that "Sejanus His Fall was not produced again in Jonson's lifetime; apparently the Restoration saw it but then it was not seen again until staged by William Poel in 1928."[6]

Footnotes

1. Robert Speaight, William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival (London, 1954), pp. 247-48.

2. Speaight, p. 248.

3. Ben Jonson on the English Stage 1660-1776 (New York, 1935; reissued 1966), p. 302.

4. A History of English Dramatic Literature, 3 vols (London, 1899), II, 339.

5. Ben Jonson, Sejanus ed. W. D. Briggs (Boston, 1911), p. xxii, n.

6. Ben Jonson's Plays (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1964), p. 69.

## Appendix B

## Pliny and Tacitus

Tacitus might best be known by the company he kept. Presumably the friendship with Pliny was mutual. Pliny had the utmost regard for Tacitus and said so. "There were at that time many celebrated geniuses in Rome; but you of all others (owing to a similarity in our dispositions) appeared to me the easiest and the most worthy object of my invitation."[1] As orators they were always mentioned together. Pliny assures us that Tacitus was the finest of his age.[2] Their friendship embraces the reputations of both. Pliny was a man of self-conscious integrity and real devotion to the public welfare, "bent on achieving fame through a good reputation."[3] They identified themselves with a morality which was proved noble but out of date. They were committed to the service of the state and to the political uses of history and art as a means of reaching tyrants when politicians and senators could not.

### Footnotes

1. Pliny, Letters, trans. William Melmoth (London 1963), II, pp. 53, 55 (Bk. VII, 20).

2. "Since therefore we are thus closely linked together by our pursuits, manners, reputation, and even by those last instances of human judgement, should all this not tend to enflame us mutually with the most ardent affection?" Pliny, Letters, II, p. 55.

3. Clarence Mendell, Tacitus the Man and His Work (New Haven, 1957), p. 12. Pliny was always hoping, for example, that Tacitus would record his part in the trial against Massa Baebius in his history "and thus make immortal his example of old fashioned integrity." (Mendell, p. 12).

## Appendix C

### The Senate and Historical Writing

History was monopolized as a discipline by the senatorial class.[1] This is Syme's thesis. If history was an extension of politics, it stands to reason that the senators were among those most experienced in public affairs, who knew most intimately the nature of oratory, and had the most direct access to the records. A senator may write as a gossip, a biographer, in an attempt to win fame out of spite for lack of success or preferment, or to expose corruption in high places. Dudley claims, for example, that Tacitus had been humiliated by his enforced silence under Domitian and that he decided to become an historian in order to reveal his treacheries to all posterity.[2] A man's career in government could end abruptly and early. The writing of history was one of the few reasonable things left to do. In short, history was a means of judging the emperors. It was one of the Senate's few remaining powers. Thus to write history was to fulfil a senatorial duty. It was this one "power" which Tiberius feared above all others, a fact which could account for much of his method of handling the Senate. The opinions of posterity alone, Tiberius could not control, though he tried by persecuting Cordus. Seneca's "To Marcia on Consolation" is proof of the point. Marcia was Cordus' daughter. She secreted her father's papers until after his death when the threats had passed. Seneca commends her. "You have done a very great service to Roman scholarship, for a large part of his writings had been burned; a very great service to posterity, for history will come to them as an uncorrupted record whose honesty cost its author dear;"[3] This power through history was a small compensation for the loss of senatorial powers. It was a final voice which could

not be recklessly abused or thrown away. Because of these circumstances, history, as a senatorial product, was bound to carry overtones resulting from their grievances, both political and moral. It is impossible for history not to reflect the experience of the men and their class where they had been embroiled in the very events they wrote about. Historical writing was a part of good government.

## Footnotes

1. Sir Ronald Syme, "The Senator as Historian," Ten Studies in Tacitus (Oxford, 1970), p. 2.

2. Donald R. Dudley, The World of Tacitus (London, 1968), p. 16.

3. Seneca, Moral Essays, trans. John W. Basore, 3 vols (London, 1958), II, 5 (Bk. I, iii).

## Appendix D

### Jonson's Alterations to Tacitus' Characters

An analysis of the alterations Jonson made to Tacitus' characters reveals much about his conception of the play. Such a study entails a double assessment, however; one must first be fairly certain about what Tacitus intended. He seems, in certain cases, to have been willing to record rather random and varied qualities. Yet to the extent that a coherant portrait emerges and is the conscious work of the writer, his characters are singular, brilliantly drawn portraits.

Jonson had to try for similar effects yet keep within the bounds of drama. Agrippina can speak boldly,

> What, my Gallus?
> Be loud Sejanus' strumpet? Or the bawd
> To Caesar's lusts, he now is gone to practice? (IV. 15-17)

Jonson keeps themes alive by placing them constantly in the mouths of the characters who are outraged by Tiberius' acts. Yet, Jonson's Agrippina is no mere chorus. She has manly eloquence, fortitude and and an excusably rash nature.[1] She gives sound advice to her sons (IV. 61-76). She does not urge them on to revolution but teaches them how to preserve their dignity under tyrants and how to be worthy of their father's name. Her message is noble suffering. This may well be a transposition by Jonson from Germanicus' parting advice to Agrippina, that she should curb her ambition and submit to fortune though it be cruel.[2] He had advised her to live peaceably with the emperors, recognizing in her a certain hostility which could prove fatal. This is not out of spirit with the record inthe Annals (II. 70-71; Grant, p. 112-113). Agrippina probably had a reasonably high annoyance

factor about her. Her followers are accustomed to calling her "royal" in the play. Silius does; Gallus does (II. 431; IV. 1). Virtue was always her guide and she was willingly outspoken on the subject. Yet Jonson has rather less to say about her revenge, her brooding and her pride. Boissier claims that Tacitus presented Agrippina as an unscrupulous woman who used her beauty in order to procure wealth and pursue ambition. She ruled like a man yet was a true woman, ruining herself by her vanity, desiring superficial distinctions as much as real power.[3] It is quite true that she and her six children were the center of an "opposition" party. It was her best way to revenge. Her virtue was itself almost a matter of policy. Far beyond Jonson's range is the possibility that Sejanus and Agrippina were vying for the same power and that her lack of subtlety was no excuse for her ambition. For him, she was a woman wronged in the death of her husband and in the treatment of her children who were the next legal heirs. "But what upset Tiberius most was the popular enthusiasm for Agrippina. The glory of her country, they called her - the only true descendent of Augustus, the unmatched model of traditional behaviour. Gazing to heaven, they prayed that her children might live to survive their enemies." (Annals, III. 4; Grant, 120-21). Sejanus did not miss the opportunity to work this in his own favor by arrousing Tiberius' deepest suspicion against her. It is the delicacy of this position which Jonson dramatizes, the impossibility of honest opinion without danger The situation revealed is compelling, but the complex nature of the person in the dilemma is suppressed in order to gain the fullest impact. Her feud with Tiberius was dynastic; Sejanus

was an upstart power seeker. Historically Agrippina was no saint. Jonson deletes Tacitus' qualifications in order to heighten the themes of tyranny, victimization, the old virtue and satiric invective. She comes off somewhat better than she was.

Arruntius was the character in the play most freely developed by Jonson. He was a Stoic whom Tiberius would have opposed in principle. For these virtues and philosophical ideas Jonson enlarged his role. As a member of the Senate, Arruntius represented that style which refused to bow to corruption. His fate was his inability to keep silent, his means of escape, the sheerly ironic quirk that he was preserved as a token of the Emperor's tolerance of the outspoken opposition. He was more good alive as propaganda, than dead. Arruntius was an insignificant figure in the Annals, but Jonson required, for dramatic purposes, a character with his qualifications who could serve as the determined and outspoken opponent to tyrants. Undoubtedly, Arruntius was chosen because of the speech which he delivered against oppression at the time of his death. (Annals VI. 48; Grant, p. 225) Tiberius had been terrible; the prospects of Caligula were too horrible to makelife worth while. No one had even given Arruntius a chance to die in heroic protest. He had to create his own pretext. Jonson probably had less reservations about the nobility of this action than Tacitus. Certainly it has the appeal of the tough-minded about it. But further motives for Arruntius' disgruntlement, besides his Stoic ideals and hatred of tyranny and immorality, are not supplied. For Jonson's satiric purposes he did not require them.

But there is a curious passage in the Annals (I. 13), which provides very different motives for Tiberius' treatment of Arruntius

which Tacitus claims were causally significant though he, himself, fails later to develop them. Toward Arruntius and the offence he gave, Tiberius "had no longstanding hostility. But he was suspicious of Arruntius, whose wealth, ctivity, and talents were celebrated. Augustus, in one of his last conversations, had gone over the names of men who would be fit and willing to become emperor; or unfit and unwilling, or fit but unwilling. He had described Marcus Aemilius Lepidus (IV) as suitable but disdainful, Gaius Asinius Gallus as eager but unsuitable, and Lucius Arruntius as both fit and capable of making the adventure, if the chance arose." "All those mentioned, apart from Lepidus, were soon struck down on one charge or another, at the instigation of Tiberius." (Annals I. 13; Grant pp. 40-41). Arruntius is characterized as an adventurer, a man capable of ambition. Augustus had doomed him in suggesting that he was the most fit to become the next emperor. Those named were forced to instil in the new emperor a genuine sense of their friendship or else join the opposition and hope for happier political circumstances under the next prince. Lepidus, lifelong friend to Tiberius, remained inconspicuous, a manuver which was essential for survival. Caligula preserved his life by going to Caprae and remaining in the open where Tiberius could scrutinize his movements, thus dispelling all fears of plots and rebellions from his quarter. Gallus wavered between camps and eventually perished, though not during the time covered in the play, while Arruntius engaged in a career of protest which lasted only because Tiberius feared him. It is reported in the Histories that Tiberius had not allowed Arruntius to take up his residence in Spain as governor

"because he was afraid of him."[4] That Arruntius had personal grounds for resentment or that Tiberius had concrete cause of fear is not part of Jonson's conceptualization of his character. Such complications could add nothing to the political patterns under analysis.

Gallus was likewise employed to swell out the group of Agrippina's supporters, but his case in history is a rather special one. Jonson was forced to obscure his career entirely in order to use him for the play. His loyalty was constantly in question. Eager for power though lacking in skills, he was suspected by Tiberius from the beginning of the reign. Gallus was a rash, provocative and insidious orator, who exasperated Tiberius continually. Syme is under the impression that Gallus belonged to Agrippina's party only because he hoped to marry her and thereby gain access to power (a marriage plot less sinister but not unlike Sejanus' own hopes to marry into the Julian family).[5] When both he and Agrippina were dead, Tiberius let loose a barrage of "filthy slanders, accusing her of adultery with Gaius Asinius Gallus, and asserting that she had wearied of living when Asinius died." (Annals Bk. VI. xxv; Grant, p. 212). The truth of the matter is dark. It may be that he was a supporter of the "right" ambitions. Jonson is not afraid to toy with the possibilities, but only a good memory or a close scrutiny of the play in one's study reveals the paradoxes. Act IV. 15 may be read cynically. Gallus may be suggesting that Agrippina not make so much of her chastity, that well employed it could aid her in her cause; that is how Agrippina interprets his few words, cutting him off before he is allowed to finish. But Jonson also turns it into a rhetorical outcry against the debasement forced upon men by politics.

Gallus' career as a senator is sketchy. Most significant is the fact that he is not present in the final meeting where Tiberius' letter is read. There, a clear demonstration of his sympathies would have been unavoidable, and Jonson simply lacked the evidence for presenting them. In the earlier trial scenes, he responds aloud to the judgment rendered against Silius with a phrase, remarkable for its ambiguity, "Nothing is great enough for Silius' merit." (III. 294) meaning that Silius deserved his fate because he had obligated the Emperor beyond his ability to pay, or that Silius was truly deserving of the praise he received. Arruntius understood it in the former sense. "Gallus on that side too?" (III. 294). Arruntius' suspicion of his defection is supported by the fact that Gallus goes beyond the requirements of the law in calling for Sosia's banishment and the confiscation of half of Silius' estate (III. 356-8). (It is Lepidus who wins milder terms, but he does so by debating against a member presumably of his own party.) Gallus later joins in the chorus of those urging that Cordus' books be burnt (III. 469). His appearance in Act IV as a friend to Agrippina is therefore puzzling. (Agrippina honors him as a friend IV. 29-31.) Gallus is either a distinct type of vacillating opportunist which Jonson meant to illustrate (Laco is such a character whom Jonson creates more fully) or else a supporting character whose historical record was too ambiguous for Jonson to develop cogently.

Lepidus, the third of the three men proposed by Augustus as candidates for the throne, is something of a model of virtue for Tacitus and certainly a man deserving admiration as Jonson renders him in the play. It is worth repeating that Jonson never mentions their chances for the throne. He wanted no grounds for associating these Germanican supporters with ulterior or treasonous motives.

Morality had to be the cover for political complaint lest the latter be interpreted as conspiracy. Lepidus, above all, save Agricola, was Tacitus' example of the man whose personal style allowed him to live and serve under tyranny. Jonson also develops this point of view leaving the debate between stoicism, protest and quietism unresolved. It is not a question which admits of an easy answer. Lepidus is the voice of the tempor izer.

Cordus is raised to prominence as a model of virtue on the testimonies of many who knew and admired him. When he had finished his oration in the chamber defending the powers of history and the freedom of speech he "walked out of the senate, and starved himself to death. The senate ordered his books to be burnt by the aediles. But they survived, first hidden and later republished. This makes one deride the stupidity of people who believe that today's authority can destroy tomorrow's memories. On the contrary, repressions of genius increase its prestige." (Annals IV. 35; Grant, 175.) Seneca accounts for the means whereby his works survived in a letter of comfort to Cordus' daughter, Marcia. It was she who hid them until the crisis passed. Seneca speaks of his works as an "uncorrupted record". His memory will remain esteemed "so long as it shall be worth while to learn the facts of Roman history - so long as there shall be anyone who will wish to hark back to the deeds of our ancestors, so long as there shall be anyone who will wish to know what it is to be a Roman hero, what it is to be unconquered when all necks are bowed and forced to bear the yoke of a Sejanus, what it is to be free in thought, in purpose, and in act."[6] Seneca provides valuable insights into what the Romans considered the uses of history. In writing a true account of the past Cordus had aided in the preservation of freedom and eloquence. Such men's names survive in good repute as long as their works are read.

Here is the consolation. But Jonson neglects to mention the cost of such free thought to Cordus. In the play he is presented in marked contrast to Silius; he is calm, rational, a keen analytical mind. Historically he, too, was a Stoic and committed to the idea of a political death. Tiberius was unimpressed with his defense and according to Dudley "listened to the defense with a scowl on his face."[7] For the purposes of the play Jonson had a great deal o f interest in this speech. Jonson had found a spokesman for himself as an historian-dramatist. Cordus left the Senate alive, suggesting that his argument had prevailed with the Emperor, had a binding hold where Silius' impassioned rhetoric had failed. That Cordus should go out and starve himself would appear to be synonymous with failure. Therefore, Jonson did not ply his audience with that fact, though it is not one which Jonson could have missed in dealing with the source. (It follows hard upon the famous speech which Jonson translated verbatim: "Egressus dein senatu vitam abstinentia finivit." Annals, IV. xxxv.) Again through deletions Jonson shaped the materials subtly to his own purpose, emphasizing the theme of the relationship between history and political liberty.

"here Tacitus fails to develop materials Jonson finds himself in some difficulty because the source does not provide him with a factual basis on which a genuine interpretation of action could be grounded. Tacitus' account of the death of Drusus is one of the more puzzling underdevelopments in the Annals, considering its potential. Walker has suggested that there was no need for him to dwell on it because it was a generally received opinion that he was poisoned by Sejanus. It was the less certain cases which required historical research and documentation in order to swell the established record, increase the evidence for Sejanus' and Tiberius' treacheries by heaping case upon

case. It is a somewhat risky argument because it takes Tacitus a long distance out of his way. But Drusus' death is rather suddenly passed over, perhaps because he was a reckless youth, uneven in his qualities and by no means a copy of Germanicus. It was better to allow the latter to stand as the model of goodness. This ambiguity is suggested in the play. Arruntius calls Drusus "A riotous youth,/There's little hope of him." (I. 105-6), though it is dispelled by every word and action which Drusus offers. Nevertheless, Arruntius is allowed to continue, meanwhile, with his praise of Germanicus,

> Oh that man!
> If there were seeds of the old virtue left,
> They lived in him. (I. 118-20)

Even so, no dramatic production is made of the encounter between Sejanus and Drusus. It is quickly over, a little obvious, wanting in debate and a precise explanation of motive. Tacitus is more concerned with the sons of Germanicus becoming orphans for the second time, (Drusus was their protector). He dispells the rumors that Tiberius was involved in the murder, though Tiberius' lack of grief was conspicuous to all. Tacitus is unreflective. "He does not even trouble to stress the wickedness of Sejanus, much less to give us Drusus' deathbed experiences."[8] Drusus' death figures in the play with approximately the same detachment and distance. Jonson refuses to elaborate on his character, preserving only his opposition to Sejanus, his protection of the other heirs and his signs of gallantry. Dramatically the scene is weak in Jonson, perhaps mishandled, but more curious is the dispassionate treatment which it receives in the Annals.

Terentius was one of the followers of Sejanus; of this there can be little doubt. Yet he managed to win a certain respect for the loyalty which he showed to his leader after Sejanus had fallen from

favor. Tacitus records Terentius' speech to the Senate (Annals VI. 8; Grant, p. 204), in which he refused to deny his friendship to the fallen minister. He argued that Tiberius had raised Sejanus to power and gave the first approval. Therefore, he should not be made guilty for holding a man dear whom Tiberius once honored. He so succinctly summarized everyone's private thoughts that he was acquitted. Jonson makes no note of this speech, yet he recognizes the individuality of the stand and makes Terentius the final spokesman for human feelings and sympathies in the play. It is ironic that the source of his appeal should have been nurtured by his love for the villain. I cannot believe that it was Jonson's intention to strike up sympathy for the fallen counsellor. Arruntius pronounces that when great villains fall they are broken permanently and that whoever lends pity to such is not wise (V. 895-7). Yet it is a strange party of men who hold the stage at the end: Lepidus, Arruntius, and Terentius, another man who is rewarded with life for his honesty, his willingness to confess the truth. It is as though Jonson is still seeking for some heart which is yet straightforward, even if it must emerge from the camp of the enemy. It is unlikely that any but the most learned of Jonson's audience would have recollected who Terentius was. The effect of the closing scene cannot have been based upon it. Perhaps he was simply a convenient character who happened to survive the melee. But Jonson can not have ignored the possibility that a few members of the audience could research his circumstances. This fact once known, makes the narration of Sejanus' death not merely a dispassionate Nuntius' account, but the sympathetic account of a loyal friend who talks of "th' unfortunate trunk" of his friend (V. 807), the "froward justice of the state" (V. 809) the "several acts of malice!" (V. 813) performed by the crowd and his "sad fall" (V. 816). He takes out his anger against

the fickle mob who turn in a trice against those to whom they were once loyal. Lepidus explains it: "They follow fortune, and hate men condemned,/Guilty or not." V. 799-800), but for a man who himself alone remained loyal the attack on the mob has a special coloring of its own. Terentius' theme is the guilt of states and he pleads to all "whose minds are good,/And have not forced all mankind from your breasts,/That yet have so much stock of virtue left/To pity guilty states ... " (V. 753-56). It is a strangely unJonsonian mood. Finally it is Terentius who, alone, urges the De casibus pattern. Let all take notice of this "insolent man" who grew too proud, slighted and blasphemed the gods. "For whom the morning saw so great and high,/Thus low and little, 'fore the' even doth lie." (V. 902-3). There is a renewal of human warmth and feeling after a wasteland of policy and practice. The account of Sejanus' death is given with tenderness bordering, in isolated phrases, upon pathos. Terentius is almost a part of another dramatic tradition. After a hard and dazzling assessment of policy, the projection of a comfortable myth of cosmic order is gratuitous. But it is part of the transitional phase of discovery in which the new politics still received its final assessment in terms of the old morality. That is true in part, at least, though Arruntius is firm; the dialogue is maintained and the conflict between politics and morality which Jonson never intended to solve is carried through to the very end.

## Footnotes

1. Though, perhaps, she is not to be too heavily criticised for her manly nature. In Rome the wives of dignitaries would be very much concerned with the politics in which their husbands dealt. If their husbands erred they too felt the blows, exile, loss of all wealth and property or the destitution following a husband's death. Says Syme, "The Romans were not tender-hearted. Least of all the governing order. There was no such word in the language." Sir Ronald Syme, Tacitus, 2 Vols (Oxford, 1970), II. 535.

2. Donald Dudley, The World of Tacitus (London, 1968), p. 89.

3. Gaston Boissier, Tacitus and Other Roman Studies, trans. W. G. Huchison (London, 1906), p. 22.

4. The Histories, trans. Clifford H. Moore (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), I. 265. (Bk. II. lxv).

5. Syme, Tacitus, I. 381.

6. Seneca, "De Consolatione ad Marciam," Moral Essays, trans. John W. Basore, 3 vols. (London, 1958), II. 5.

7. Dudley, p. 119.

8. Bessie Walker, The "Annals" of Tacitus; A Study in the Writing of History (Manchester, 1952), p. 129.

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